

Sad Statements Of The Bible

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2000 Bellview Lectures

Sad Statements Of The Bible

Michael Hatcher, Editor

Twenty-Fifth Annual
Bellview Lectures

Pensacola, Florida

June 10-14, 2000

Sad Statements Of The Bible

Copyrighted © 2000 Bellview Church of Christ
4850 Saufley Field Road
Pensacola, FL 32526

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the publisher.

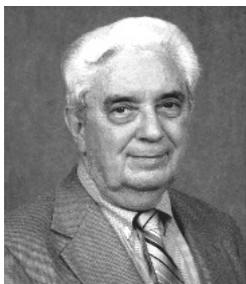
Other Bellview Lectureship Books

Worldliness
Christian Fellowship
Leadership
Preaching God Demands
The Doctrine Of Christ Versus The Doctrines Of Men
Changes In The Church of Christ
God's Pattern For Christian Living
Current Crises Challenging The Church
The Church Triumphant
What Does God Authorize In Worship?
In Hope Of Eternal Life
Are We Moving Away From The Cross Of Christ?

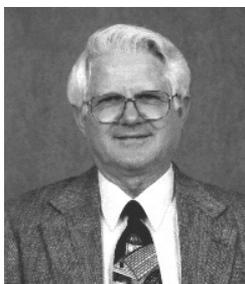
IT IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL
TO DUPLICATE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL.

The material in this study represents a considerable investment of effort, skill, time, and finances from both the authors and the publisher. If this material is photocopied and circulated to avoid buying a book for each student, the publisher does not sell enough copies to support the publication.

DEDICATION



Bill Gallaher



Paul Brantley



Fred Stancliff

The Elders of the Bellview Church of Christ

It seems only fitting to dedicate this book of the silver anniversary of the Bellview Lectures to the elders of this congregation: Paul Brantley, Bill Gallaher, and Fred Stancliff. Twenty-five years ago, this eldership decided to start a lecture series. It is through their wisdom that this lectureship has continued. Then, in 1988, they made the wise decision to start putting the lectures in book form (this being the thirteenth such book). There is no way of determining the eternal good that these lectures and the books have done.

The Bible also refers to elders as *pastors*. This deals with the manner in which they do their work; as *elders* refer to their age and maturity. Elders do their work as a pastor or shepherd, under the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 2:25). These men have served well as shepherds of the flock of God which is among them (1 Pet. 5:2). As shepherds they have made sure the congregation has been fed a good diet of spiritual food. They demand that God's Word and only that Word is taught from the pulpit and from the classes. They also watch for dangers which might creep into the church. Thus, they keep informed of what is happening in the church universal. With that knowledge, they then watch for dangers in this congregation also.

Elders are also *bishops* or *overseers*. This is the work that elders perform. Elders rule the congregation, making decisions to best carry out God's Laws. Part of those decisions deal with this Lectureship. They know that this lectureship is a good way to feed the flock and protect it from error. They also have made the wise decision to oversee certain works through the years—all for the cause of Christ.

Elders are to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). These three men are certainly worthy of emulation by others. They lead lives that are directed by the Word of God. They demonstrate by their lives that God comes first. Parents can tell their children to look at these elders and live like they live, do what they do, with the knowledge that by doing so, their children will be living like God desires.

They, as all faithful elders, spend a great deal of time, effort, and energy in doing the work associated with the church. They are dedicated servants of the Most High. They are concerned with the souls of man. As such, they have taught, both publicly and privately, the Scriptures to others. They have even gone into the mission fields themselves, using their money, because of their love for the souls of man and their desire for man's salvation.

Much more could be written. The respect which the congregation shows these men speaks well of them. The congregation lovingly submits to their leadership because they realize that the elders/shepherds have the best interest of their souls in mind.

Paul wrote, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Rom. 13:7). These men are certainly worthy of the honor that is due them, and we are happy to dedicate this 2000 Bellview Lectureship book to: Paul Brantley, Bill Gallaher, and Fred Stancliff.

Michael Hatcher

DEDICATION TO THE BELLVIEW ELDERS

Dedication of the 2000 Bellview Lectureship book to the eldership of the Bellview congregation is an appropriate rendering of honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7). These godly men have served faithfully for many years, laboring diligently to “take care of the church” (1 Tim. 3:5). They have ruled well (1 Tim. 5:17); thus, are worthy of the honor bestowed upon them. However, in their humility, they would seek no such honor.

Their admirable work has been with compassion and prayerful consideration as they have led the church in times of calm and storm. Their dedication to the Lord and His Word have been unwavering, moved not by friend or foe. Their defense of the gospel has been unflagging (Phi. 1:17). Therefore, they and the Bellview church, are known by their faithful friends who support them, by their ungodly enemies who oppose them, and by the Lord (Acts 8:1; 9:4).

The Bellview elders have exhibited a faith which could be followed, have exercised rule to which Christian men and women have gladly submitted in willing obedience, and have painstakingly watched for the souls of the congregation’s members (Heb. 13:17). Thus, these men are deserving of our love, honor, and exhortation (1 Pet. 5:1). They have fed the flock of God, exercising proper oversight and exemplary conduct willingly and of a ready mind (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Happy and blessed are those who have served under their oversight (Acts 20:28). Many and great are the good works in which they have led this congregation, including this lectureship, and the printing of this lectureship book, which so fittingly is dedicated to these outstanding leaders of the Lord’s church. May God’s richest blessings be theirs.

Bobby Liddell

MUCH APPRECIATION TO THE BELLVIEW ELDERS

When the elders of Pensacola's Bellview church of Christ invited me to accept their oversight of my gospel efforts, I said they might not realize what they were asking—that in addition to my work as a missionary to the Far East and Southeast Asia, I also was editor of the militant gospel paper, *Contending for the Faith*, and, as such, was subject to immense, intense criticism, which also would overflow to them.

That was in December 1978. Assuring me that they thought they could *take* whatever opportunity might accrue to them as a result of our connection, certainly in the twenty-one-plus years that have ensued since then, they have had ample opportunity to see if they could take it or not—and they have done so in a most magnificent manner.

Never at any time in all these years has there been the slightest friction between us; and I am grateful.

In addition to backing me in my longtime defense of the faith, they have received, accounted for, and disbursed funds enabling me to go preach and teach the gospel in many foreign countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, China, Taiwan, India, Nepal, Indonesia, the Philippines, Latvia, Russia, and possibly others.

At least two of these elders have themselves carried the gospel into some of these countries in person—Fred Stancliff into Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Australia; and Paul Brantley into Latvia and Russia.

God bless these two elders and Bill Gallaher, who kept the home fires burning when his fellow elders and I were so far away doing our best to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord.

Ira Y. Rice, Jr.

PREFACE

While attending the Memphis School Of Preaching Lectureship, brother Harrell Davidson made a comment about Genesis 3 being the saddest statement in the Bible. The expression struck a cord with me, and I started thinking that it would make a wonderful theme. The more I considered and studied this idea, the more I understood that it covers so many different areas—thus, the genesis of this Lectureship Book. You will find contained herein subjects dealing with the Lord’s church, the plan of salvation, mission work, the eldership, and apostasy. We have lessons dealing with the family and the judgment, along with many others. There are so many sad statements that it became difficult to limit. Whenever man does not follow God’s directions and goes his own way, we observe a sad situation and sad statements being found. We pray that this book will help you in living the Christian life.

Without the help of many different ones, this lectureship could and would not take place. Lectureships take a great deal of work behind the scenes and without their efforts no lectureship would come to fruition.

We thank each of those who have spent diligent time and effort in preparing and writing the manuscripts for this book. We also thank those who have presented the material at the lectureship. We have confidence in these men and their soundness in the faith, love for the church, and willingness to spend and be spent for her. We also thank the secretary, Denise Mowery, for her work with the book. I also appreciate Gary Summers in the fine job he does in helping me proofread.

The elders of this congregation decided to sponsor this lectureship twenty-five years ago. There is untold good that this series has done through the years. We appreciate them for their foresight and willingness to do the work and oversight necessary for this great work. Because of their soundness and love for the truth, this lectureship has remained on the solid rock of Christ our Lord and His Word.

The members of this congregation are in solid support of her over-seeing elders, as it should be. They lovingly follow the lead of the elders in the work they have set forth. Many are the number who help in making this lectureship the success it is. They generously give of their money and time to support this fine work. We now send this book out with the prayer that it will help you in living faithfully the Christian life.

*Michael Hatcher, Director
January 18, 2000*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What Makes A Verse “Sad”?	
Keith A. Mosher, Sr.	1
“What Is Truth?”; John 18:38	
David P. Brown	12
When Fellowship Is Broken; Genesis 3	
Harrell Davidson	26
“Only Evil Continually”; Genesis 6:5	
Terry M. Hightower	35
Cannot Enter The Land; Deuteronomy 34:4	
John Priola	54
Another Generation Which Knew Not Jehovah; Judges 2:10	
Eddie Whitten	67
“Curse Ye Meroz”; Judges 5:23	
Lynn Parker	78
“No King In Israel”; Judges 17:6	
Guss Eoff	90
“Ichabod”; 1 Samuel 4:21-22	
Harold Bigham	100
“Absalom, My Son, My Son Absalom! Would God I Had Died For Thee”; 2 Samuel 18:33; 19:4	
Ronnie Hayes	112
“Who Made Israel To Sin”; 1 Kings 14:16	
Howell Bigham	124
“Departed Without Being Desired”; 2 Chronicles 21:20	
Ted J. Clarke	137
“Mine Own Familiar Friend”; Psalm 41:9	
Joel Wheeler	151
“Rivers Of Waters Run Down Mine Eyes”; Psalm 119:136	
Ira Y. Rice, Jr.	159
Improper Leaders; Jeremiah 5:31	
Clifford Newell, Jr.	169
“Neither Could They Blush”; Jeremiah 6:15	
David B. Jones	179
“We Will Not Walk Therein”; Jeremiah 6:16	
Eddy Craft	200
“Is It Nothing?”; Lamentations 1:12	
Gary L. Grizzell	210

Elders Feeding Themselves; Ezekiel 34:2	
Carl Garner	230
“Weighed In The Balances, And...Found Wanting”; Daniel 5:25-27	
Curtis A. Cates	247
“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem”; Matthew 23:37	
Tom Wacaster	259
“Depart From Me”; Matthew 25:41	
Tim Nichols	274
“I Know Not The Man”; Matthew 26:74	
Bob Sweeten	286
“My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me”; Matthew 27:46	
Joseph D. Meador	296
“God Heareth Not Sinners”; John 9:31	
Michael Hatcher	303
Unconcerned With Sin; 1 Corinthians 5:2	
Michael Light	319
“So Soon Removed”; Galatians 1:6-9	
Noah Hackworth	327
“They Will Not Endure Sound Doctrine”; 2 Timothy 4:2-3	
Paul Vaughn	342
“Demas Hath Forsaken Me”; 2 Timothy 4:10	
Joe E. Galloway	353
Dead Thinking They Were Alive; Revelation 3:1	
Bobby Liddell	365
Sad Verses Not In The Bible	
Gary W. Summers	376

WHAT MAKES A VERSE “SAD”?

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.



Keith Mosher, Sr. and his wife Dorothy have been married for thirty-eight years. They have three children; Keith, Jr., Mark, and Karen, and five grandchildren.

He is a 1975 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has B. A., M.A., and M.Th. degrees from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has worked with congregations in Mississippi and Tennessee. Keith speaks at gospel meetings and lectureships throughout the states. He has done mission work in Asia, Africa, and Russia. He is a full-time instructor at Memphis School of Preaching and

currently serves as Dean of Academics.

Keith has written two workbooks on Romans and Acts, a tract entitled “Can One Trust His English Bible?” and articles for various publications. He is a staff writer for *Bible Light* and has recently finished a book on inspiration, *The Book God Breathed*.

INTRODUCTION

The idea behind the question within this title is that some passages of Scripture can cause despair in the hearts of some and leave them with a feeling of dejection. Why is such the case? Why do some find that Bible teaching brings gloom and despair to their minds?

To answer the latter questions about what causes such disappointment, or even moroseness, two Bible words will be studied—*sad* and *burden*. Then some biblical examples will be noted in which the person or persons reacted to God’s commands in such a way that rather than joy, gloom resulted.

To each one who reads this brief essay, the warning is given to behold the “goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22).¹ For those who disobey God, fellowship is torn, evil reigns, generations are lost, children are hurt, friends become enemies, and there is a “depart from me” at judgment (Mat. 25:41). It is even possible that some will be eternally *sadder* than others if, once knowing the joy of truth, they depart from it (2 Pet. 2:20-24)! Imagine spending eternity **knowing** that at one time in life salvation was obtained but then squandered. How deeply, terribly, unfathomably sad for such a soul. Paul warned that the

severity of God was on those who “fell” (Rom. 11:22). Is there aught sadder than the fall of a child of God?

Sad and *burden* and the verses in which one finds them are all solemn warnings against departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). In the words of the rich one in Tartarus, “I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24).

“SAD” VERSES

Pharaoh had locked the faithful Joseph in prison, but through God’s providence the keeper gave Joseph favour so he became a prisoner in charge of prisoners (Gen. 39:21-23). When the chief butler and chief baker committed some political or personal faux pas, they were sentenced to prison where they met Joseph (Gen. 40:1-4). The butler and baker are recorded as having dreamed and when Joseph saw them, “behold they were sad” (Gen. 40:6). “Sad” is *zaaph* which carries the idea of being “angry, gloomy, morose, sad.”² It seems that what **caused** their despair was not knowing the meaning of their dreams and that lack of information about their visions left them “foaming” or “burning” (*zaaph, sad*) about that which was meant by the dreams.³ *Zaaph*, is also located in Daniel 1:10 where the record is that the captive Jewish lads’ countenances would be “worse liking” than other Jewish captives if the lads did not eat Babylonian food, which food was unclean to the Jews. The jailor or guard over the captive boys was *fearful* that the king would punish him, if the lads appeared *sad* or decimated from lack of food.

The Greek equivalent of *zaaph* and the usage related to the sadness of Pharaoh’s baker and butcher and the captive lads can be found in Matthew 6:16. Jesus warned His disciples not to be of a “sad countenance” when fasting. The fear of the unknown, the fear of a king, and *false* sadness as if one feared God are all indications that one source of sadness is fear. Those who do not know God’s revealed will for salvation face a sad future indeed, and will face God in a *fearful* way instead of a good way (2 Cor. 5:10). The fearful can not enter heaven (Rev. 21:8).

In the second place, there exists the Old Testament word *sar*. A good example of the latter term and its meaning is found in Nehemiah 2:1-2. Nehemiah was a cup-bearer for his captor, king Artaxerxes, and as a servant to the king never, under penalty of death, was Nehemiah to appear before the ruler with a sad (*sar*) countenance (Neh. 2:1). However, because Nehemiah longed to return to Jerusalem, he could not forbear

wearing a gloomy face as he came into Artaxerxes' presence. Fortunately, Artaxerxes recognized the source of Nehemiah's gloom as a "heavy heart" and allowed Nehemiah's approach (Neh. 2:2). (Gesenius even indicates that *sar* is an adjective whose root has the sense of **evil** and the term is usually, biblically applied to the look on one's face when some trouble is in evidence).⁴

Further evidence that *sar* indicates a troubled heart is found in the record of the evil king Ahaz of Judah. When the king was rebuked by a prophet, the text contains the record that Ahaz went to his house "heavy [*sar*] and displeased" (1 Kin. 20:43; 21:4-5). There is also in Holy Writ the proverb which advises that wine be given unto those with *heavy* hearts (Pro. 31:6). The second source of sadness, then, is displeasure brought on by some unpleasant situation. Imagine the *sar* (heaviness) of those burdened by sin who hear biblical messages that rebuke such action or character. Such sadness has its source in the **evil** actions of the one rebuked (cf., 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

In the third place, it must be noted that not all sadness is seen, biblically, as sourced or originating in either fear or evil. Solomon wrote that "Sorrow *is* better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" (Ecc. 7:3). When one is willing to "look death or difficulty in the face," one is, according to the wise Solomon, able to learn how to make better use of life and to improve one's outlook. Such soberness of mind, seemingly a moroseness to the world, is morally superior to "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." Life is far too short to waste it entirely on mirth, riot, and tumult (Phi. 4:8). There exists, then, the biblical notion that not all *sadness* is descriptive of fearfulness or evilness.

In the fourth place, when one opts for a "god" other than the living Jehovah, that person is sadly evil. Jeremiah reminded the Jews of his day that they were not to "walk after other gods to your hurt" (Jer. 7:6b). *Hurt* is from the same root word as *sadness* in Ecclesiastes 7:3 which was quoted above. Evil activity, has as its consequence sadness, but especially an **evil** sadness; that is, the one who replaces the living God with a god and in so doing rebels against Jehovah, faces a dire consequence that **must** be blamed on the perpetrator of the activity. Those who read Bible verses and discover that their own actions have consequences, which will not alter, truly find such passages sad indeed. Sadly, men love this world so very much that they do not desire to read

nor hear of limitations placed on their sins (2 Tim. 3:13). Any verse of the Bible that limits, rebukes, or corrects is sad to such evil men.

“BURDENSOME” VERSES

A verse of Scripture or command from God becomes a *burden* when the reader does not intend nor want to obey it. God did not intend, however, for his commands to be burdens, but He did mean for His people to learn to relieve the burdens (*aguddah*) of others (cf., Isa. 58:6).⁵ The Hebrew *aguddah* is equivalent to the English, *bundle*, and is used of something so heavy that it is said to be carried by a yoke as placed on oxen.⁶ The true worshipper of God has learned that God has chosen to “loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke” (Isa. 58:6). The New Testament idea is to “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). But, to the rebellious, God’s commands are heavy, grievous loads, which ideas are contrary to Scripture (1 John 5:3).

Another word translated “burden” in the Old Testament is *massa* or “load” (cf., Num. 4:15-49).⁷ The ancient Levitical priests were instructed to carry certain items of the tabernacle and thus to be a part of the “service of the burden in the tabernacle” (Num. 4:47). *Massa* also referred to the load placed on the shoulders of God’s leaders in caring for the people (Num. 11:11, 17).

When the commands of God become a *massa* or “load” too heavy to bear, it is the case that the hearer has incurred the wrath of God due to sin. As the Psalmist, such a sinner cries out that “mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Psa. 38:4). To those who have no love for God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, or anything spiritual, surely sin is **no** burden for such a one does not care. But, to the person who does care, sin is a heavy burden and there is no “rest in my bones because of my sin” (Psa. 38:3b).

God does pronounce a *massa* or burden on sinners. For example, Isaiah pronounced such onuses on Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, the desert of the sea, Dumah, Arabia, the valley of vision, Tyre, and others because of their sins (Isa. 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1). (Those who believe and/or teach that the Gentiles were not amenable to God’s law but were simply operating by a law of the heart need to discover how a Jewish prophet could pronounce a burden

on the Gentile people as did Isaiah!) Further, Jeremiah will rebuke those who even begin to think that God's commands are burdensome:

But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD (Jer. 23:38).

God does not find His commands burdensome! God does not command in order to burden nor make sad. What makes a verse a load and gloomy is the reaction of the hearer to the message.

Some react by putting off, usually until it is too late, obeying what is commanded (cf., Felix, Acts 24:25-27). Such people view God's verses as burdensome and as taking all the *fun* out of life (cf., Heb. 11:25).

Some react to God's commands by overt rebellion, refusing to hear the verse taught (cf., Acts 7:51-58). Bible teachers have often heard such sad responses to biblical teaching as: "You are judging me" or "I know what the Bible says, but" or "You have your religion and I have mine," ad infinitum.

Some who are prideful, satisfied, or ignorant will try to "argue the Bible" as if to appear religious (cf., Isa. 58:4). Their sad state is that they may even think they are *saved* or *religious* (Mat. 7:21-23). The deep despair of such folks on the judgment day can only be surmised!

A sadness of the deepest sort will be experienced by faithful Bible teachers (1 Cor. 3:10-15). When one is careful to build converts on the foundation of Christ, it is still sadly possible, that instead of "gold, silver, precious stone" one will find "wood, hay, stubble" (1 Cor. 3:11-12). On the judgment day and during its fiery trial, converts whose Christian character is like precious metals will endure, but those who are not faithful will perish as would wood, hay, and stubble in actual fire (1 Cor. 3:13). The sad fact is that the teacher will **know** which converts endured and which did not (1 Cor. 3:14-15)!

Bible verses are burdens to the bad and sad to the sinner; but comforting to Christians who have taken Jesus' *yoke* and let Him place an oh, so light burden on them (Mat. 11:28-30).

SADNESS ILLUSTRATED BY JUDAH

It is beyond the obvious, but still needs stating, that the Bible is **one** book. There is **one** primary message regardless of the dispensation—salvation is extended from God's grace to, and only to, those who obey

(Gen. 6:22; Exo. 19:1-6; Heb. 5:8-9). To illustrate why verses of Holy Writ are *sad*, three passages of Scripture are presented here which convey exactly the same message although expressed in different words. The first biblical section is from Isaiah, the second is from Matthew 23, and the third from Matthew 22.

Isaiah chapter one, the prologue to that great Messianic text, presents God's case against His people in Judah and Jerusalem. The people are a

sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward (Isa. 1:4).

In fact, Judah was so sin-sick that she is likened to Sodom and Gomorrah and to a petrified body full of open sores (Isa. 1:10, 6). God is also *sick* of Judah's worship for she is evil in heart and soul and God is "full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats" (Isa. 1:11). God **never** desired ritualistic worship and heart-less service (Isa. 1:12-13), but God did **desire** that His people do well and learn to come to Him: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). God, through Isaiah, revealed that He longed to meet the needs of His people. God **desired** to pardon, forgive, and to give peace even though God had rebuked Judah as dumber than an ox or donkey. Still, God yearned to save her (Isa. 1:3, 19). God had the desire to blot out His beloved nation's sins, but Judah had to make the **decision**.

Sadly, (and this is always that which "makes a verse sad") Judah spurned the invitation. She made an overt decision to rebel and to refuse God's mercy, and thus Judah would face military invasion from Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome! Isaiah reminded Judah of her sad decision for

in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: **and ye would not**. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift (Isa. 30:15-16).

The descendants of the ancient Judaeans acted just like their ancestors when Pilate asked what he should do with their King and they cried, "Crucify Him!" Those who wilfully indulge in sin are sad, sad indeed

for they are actually saying, “Let his blood be upon us and upon our children” (Mat. 27:25)! **Disaster** is the end for such who spurn God’s desire to save and decide to rebel.

SADNESS ILLUSTRATED BY JERUSALEM

As the Lord Jesus viewed His beloved temple city and thought of what she could have been, He cried:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord (Mat. 23:37-39).

No reader of the Bible nor student of Jesus can read the above words and miss hearing the tremendous **desire** of the Master to save the city. Jesus’ own brethren, the seed of Abraham, would not receive Him in spite of His yearning. The fact that Jesus said “how often” implies that He had always longed, throughout history, to bring Jerusalem to Him. His compassion in seeing the city left desolate speaks volumes about His desire. The Greatest Preacher who ever lived said it so simply that a child can grasp the message—He wanted, desired, longed for His people to be saved (cf., 1 Tim. 2:4).

But, and this exception is what makes the passage *sad*, Jerusalem decided not to respond—“and ye would not” (Mat. 23:37b). They would not have Jesus to reign over them and actually thought He was an imposter (Luke 19:14). They **decided** to crucify Him and to let His blood be upon them and their children (Mat. 27:25). They wanted a murderer and robber, Barabbas, (whose name means “son of his father”) instead of the Son of God (Mat. 27:20). Sadly, God had no alternative but to leave the house *desolate* for such a rebellious people.

Note that Jesus said, “Your house **is** left unto you desolate” (Mat. 23:38). When Jesus uttered His desire to save the city, the temple was intact and the people’s houses were still standing. But their decision had triggered God’s response, for what Jerusalem planted she would reap (cf., Gal. 6:7). Jesus could see that Jerusalem was, sadly, **past** saving!

There is such a thing as crossing the line in rebelling against God—for individuals, homes, and nations. Man can (and does) ignore God for a time, but “He, that being often reproveth hardeneth *his* neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Pro. 29:1). Too, those

who think they are “getting away with sin” have misread God’s nature. “These *things* hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such an one* as thyself: *but* I will reprove thee, and set *them* in order before thine eyes” (Psa. 50:21). Can a verse be sadder to one who, at judgment perhaps, realizes suddenly that he has no hope; that one has so lived that he took God for granted and lived his own way? When men can know God, but refuse to glorify Him as God; when men change the truth of God into a lie and worship and serve the creation more than the Creator; when men do not like to retain God in their knowledge—God gives them up to their own devices (Rom. 1:18ff). Every passage of Holy Writ is thus sad to such people.

Judah knew God and communed with God, but she demanded the death of Messiah because He did not meet their expectations. At that moment, God wrote **finished** on the city. Jerusalem was doomed. What a disaster from their decision. (Historians note that nearly 90,000 Jews were captured and the rest died of starvation or slaughter when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Some estimates are that 5 million Jews were slain and, of course, the city and temple were razed.⁸ Truly, Jerusalem was abandoned).⁹ But, the Jews **asked** for such destruction (Mat. 27:25). How terribly sad when God desires to save, yet a whole nation decides that disaster is better!

God has the ability to save (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 1:16). But only those who **decide** to be saved will be (Rev. 22:17). God has no other alternative for He will “not at all acquit *the wicked*” (Nah. 1:3). The wages of sin is death and the soul that sins shall die: there exists nothing else for the rebellious (Rom. 6:23; Eze. 18:4).

SADNESS ILLUSTRATED BY A WEDDING FEAST

Jesus often taught in parables (Mat. 13:10). One of the best known of His parabolic teachings is the marriage feast (Mat. 22:1-10):

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, he kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and *my* fatlings *are* killed, and all things *are* ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of *it*, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated *them* spitefully, and slew *them*. But when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth: and he sent forth his

armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

The king's palace is pictured by Jesus as filled with excitement for the king's son was to be married. Many were invited to the feast for the king **desired** them to come. Invitations were sent and then other servants were dispatched to remind the invitees about the wedding (Mat. 22:3-4). What king would not desire that his neighbors and friends come to his son's marriage? Such a joyous time was expected and the king prepared the feast: the king furnished the meat, the king had his cooks fix the meal, the king paid the bills, the king had a great desire for guests to come.

One might imagine that the king left no thing undone in order to insure that the wedding would be a gala event. He spared neither money, time, nor effort. "**All**" things were ready (Mat. 22:4). Strange, but true, the guests **decided not** to come! In fact, the invitees made *light* of the king's desire (Mat. 25:5). (Note that the king's desire was so great that he would not cease his efforts, but sent other servants (Mat. 22:6).) These invites had a "second chance" and still refused!

In A.D. 70, when Titus overran Jerusalem, this parable of the Lord's was literally fulfilled. About five million died, their houses were burned and their temple was destroyed so that not one "stone [was left] upon another" (Mat. 24:1-2). The king in the parable represents God, and the son is Christ. The servants are prophets, and the invitees are Jews. And those Jews who slew the prophets sent unto them (because they **decided** not to hearken to God's **desire** to serve them) faced a sad end indeed; in fact, they met with **disaster**! God furnished everything the Jews needed. He gave them protection, refuge, a land, and a Savior, yet they refused God's mercy. It is no wonder that Jesus said:

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen (Mat. 22:11-14).

Why would the merciful king destroy those murderers and burn their city? Why? Because, sadly, the people decided against keeping company with the king at the marriage of his son!

Such a “king” does not sound like the lovely, tender, grandfatherly “God” modernists and liberals talk about today. Such errorists preach the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and that all are *good* and no one is *bad*. The parable from Jesus about a wrathful king hardly sounds like Doctor Sounding Brass or professor Tinkling Cymbal. The Bible teaches that God is angry with the wicked every day (Psa. 7:11).

God’s Son left the glory of heaven because of a great desire to save sinners (Luke 19:10). Such should make all sentient beings ecstatic, but to the majority of the people such a verse like Luke 19:10 is sad indeed for the many are lost and still lost (Mat. 7:13-14). They have refused the invitation (Mat. 11:28-30). If one decides against God, He **must** and **will** destroy one (Mat. 10:28; Heb. 9:27).

At judgment evil, Satan, his angels, even death (man’s enemy) will all be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 22:15). God is love, longsuffering, mercy, and grace; but God is also a “consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

CONCLUSION

Sadness and burdens are Bible concepts. God desires to save and, depending on man’s decision, disaster will either come or be averted. Taking man’s way is death (Pro. 14:12). Deciding to take God’s way is life (John 6:63).

In professed Christendom today (even in the church), the general idea is that it matters not what kind of religion one has so long as one is sincere. Such belief is contrary to the Word of God (Mat. 7:21-23). There are no back doors, side doors, nor hidden doors in heaven; there is only one door, **The Door**, Jesus the Christ (John 14:6).

God had the desire to save. In the three passages from Isaiah and Matthew the people involved were on record as **deciding** against God. **Disaster** followed in each instance. God invited Judah to reason with Him (Isa. 1:18). She said no. God longed for Jerusalem to be His city (Mat. 23:37). She said no. Two thousand years ago God invited men to come to His Son (John 3:16). Sadly, most have decided to ignore the bidding. Disaster **will** follow for the wicked will be turned into hell (Mat. 24:46). How greatly sad indeed are those verses that point out terrible future awaiting sinners (Mat. 25:46)!

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²William Wilson, “*zaph*,” *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 365.

³*Ibid.*, “Foaming” and “burning” are primary meanings of *zaph*.

⁴Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, trans. Samuel P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 595.

⁵Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint), p. 127.

⁶Wilson, “*aguddah*,” p. 59.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Flavius Josephus, “The Wars of the Jews,” *Josephus, Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub., 1960), p. 589.

⁹“Desolate” is *ereemos*, which can mean a desert or deserted place. The term is omitted in the Westcott-Hort text, and the sentence in the latter text would mean, “Behold your house is abandoned to your care.” If the Westcott-Hort is correct, the meaning is quite impressive, for Jesus meant that those would have cared for Israel had quit any further effort. See Alexander Bruce, “The Synoptic Gospel,” *The Expositors’ Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990 reprint), p. 287.

“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

JOHN 18:38

David P. Brown



David Brown was born in 1946 in Camden, Arkansas. He is married to the former Joann Anglin of Jackson, Tennessee. They have four children: Timothy, Carrie, Rebekah, and Joanna, and four grandchildren.

He holds the B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from Northeastern Oklahoma State University and has completed course work toward the Ed.D. at Oklahoma State University.

David has been preaching for thirty-three years and is active in gospel meeting work and lectureships in and out of the United States. He has written for several religious journals and for seven years served as Associate Editor for the *Christian Worker* and now serves as editor for *Contending For The Faith*.

He has served as Assistant Director of Turley Children's Home in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies in Austin, Texas. He presently preaches for the Spring Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, is founding director of the Houston College of Bible.

INTRODUCTION

The question serving as our title for this chapter comes from Pontius Pilate. It was drawn from him by the following words of our Lord. Jesus said, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37).¹ Pilate responded with the question, “What is truth” (John 18:38)?

In reality Pilate was saying that truth is not objective, absolute, and humanly attainable. Of course, Pilate's response gives us an insight into what governed Pilate and why he conducted himself as he did with Jesus. In any matter of consequence why should we believe that he would change his attitude toward the truth as well as his mode of operation? Of course, he was not the only person of that time and place who thought about truth in this way. And, this view of truth did not cease with the passing of the first century. In the intervening 2000 years various and sundry persons have adopted the view of truth espoused by Pilate.

With the beginning of a new millennium many people believe that truth is subjective and relative, or if there is absolute truth regarding anything, it is not humanly attainable. Many of those that occupy places of power in government, education, religion, morals, and the media are those who radically advocate and champion the subjective and relative concept of truth. Thus, Pilate's philosophical children are alive and well today; and, no doubt, will be until the end of time. Therefore, there is a need for this study and many more like it.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

In this chapter this author is upholding the truth about Truth, namely that it is objective and absolute. By *objective* this scribe means something existing in its own right apart from and not influenced by any one's personal beliefs, emotions, or perceptions regarding it. In contradistinction to *objective* is *subjective*. One is subjective who determines reality entirely by one's own mental operation. By the preceding statement this writer means that one's own personal beliefs, emotions, or perceptions determine reality to a subjective person. However, *truth* means that which corresponds to reality. It is just what a thing is. *False* means that which is the opposite of the truth (that which does not correspond with reality). *Absolute* means that truth is independent of the mental operations of man. By *attainable* this scribe means that humans who desire to find attainable truth can find it and know they have found it. Indeed, if we cannot find the Truth and know we have found it, the Bible cannot be a meaningful revelation from God to man. Furthermore, **if you are reading this material and do not believe you can know the Truth, why are you reading it in the first place? What can you hope to learn?** "Truth is truth and always will be truth regardless of what men think about it." Indeed, truth can be found, believed, and embraced by finite honest humans.

THE NATURE OF TRUTH

I am either sitting before my computer screen, keying in these words or I am not. In other words, it is true or not true that I am sitting before my computer screen, keying in these words. Unless I assume the position of a complete skeptic, I know that I am sitting here before my computer screen, keying in these words. If I am a skeptic, I do not know what I am doing (if *doing* has any meaning) or whether I am here or not (whatever

here means). In fact (if there is a fact), I do not know what *know* means (if there is any meaning of any kind) or what *I* means if there is any *I*. On and on one can go with this kind of lunacy. When a person gets to the point in his thinking that he loses touch with reality, he has gone intellectually crazy.

Indeed, when a skeptic affirms anything, he gives up his skepticism. Why is this the case? To affirm anything one must make an objective absolute knowledge claim that is humanly attainable. Such is self-contradictory to the skeptic's position and is, therefore, false. Moreover, **it is nonsense!** Yet, this kind of palaver governs much of the thinking of many so-called intellectuals in and out of the church. Thus, as some have had occasion to do, when one triumphantly declares that one cannot know anything, just ask the *sage* if he **knows** that one cannot know anything. Or, if such a character proclaims that truth is not absolute, ask him if he is **absolutely sure** that truth is not absolute.

TRUTH IS PROPOSITIONAL

We must understand that truth is propositional. A propositional sentence is one that states that something is or is not the case. For example note the next two sentences. "Jesus Christ of Nazareth is Deity." "Baptism is for the remission of sins." The previous two sentences are examples of affirmative propositional sentences. An example of a negative proposition is: "The Lord's Supper may not be observed on Wednesday." All three of the previously cited sentences are either true or not true, that is, they are true or false. There is no middle ground in these propositions. Hence, there is no so-called *gray area* that is neither true or not true. Hence, if one says that baptism for the remission of sins is true and another man says it is false, it is absurd for a third person to say that the previous two men's assertions are both true. Again, this is what I mean by truth being objective and absolute.

Some think that we can only diligently look for the truth—but in reality never find it. However, Jesus said, "ye shall know the truth" (John 8:32). This does not mean that one claims to know everything because he knows something. This author does not know many things, but he does know at this writing he is sitting before his computer screen, keying in these words. Furthermore, this writer knows that the Bible says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). No matter who or how many tell him otherwise, he knows these things

anyway. Moreover, to deny such is self-contradictory. As stated already, one must make an absolute knowledge claim to affirm that one can only diligently look for the truth.

The Bible has no meaning if we cannot know what it teaches. There would be no reason to study, learn, live, preach, and defend the truth. However, the Bible states that it should be studied, learned, lived, preached, and defended (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:7; Phi. 1:27; 2:12-16; Mat. 5:16; Jude 3). To teach otherwise is to teach error. And, it is the teaching of error that makes one a false teacher.

THE BIBLE AND PROPOSITIONAL TRUTH

The Bible is either true or false. It is not partially true and partially false, as some have contended. Hence, there is no *gray area* where one does not have to believe every statement in the Bible while continuing to maintain that in general it is God's Word. To affirm that the Bible is composed of truth is to imply (due to the nature of truth) that it is composed of propositional truth. The same is true regarding any error that one might claim exists in the Bible. There is no such thing as non-propositional truth. Indeed, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were moved* by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). The apostle Paul said, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly" (1 Tim. 4:1). What did the Spirit speak? He spoke **words**. What are words? They are signs of ideas or vehicles of thought. Moreover, Paul spoke them expressly (plainly). Therefore, the Bible is composed of God's statements to man. If God's revelation is not propositional God has never spoken to anyone. However, God did speak to Noah when He commanded him to "make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Gen. 6:14). Noah understood God's Word and obeyed Him (Gen. 6:22). Furthermore, Paul expressed the propositional nature of truth when he wrote:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

If the Bible is wrong on this point, no one can be sure about the nature of revelation or anything else of which it speaks. Moreover, it would not be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Remember, all of God's commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172). Hence, if the Bible is not propositional truth, it is a useless book.

GOSPEL TRUTH IS ACCESSIBLE

Though this scribe has briefly discussed what he means by truth being attainable, in the light of the preceding material it is necessary for me to further discuss the matter, especially as it pertains to the Truth of the Bible. Often we hear people say regarding those who have definite religious convictions and the courage to speak out regarding them: "Who made you a judge?" "You are legalistic," "How do you know you are right?" "What difference does it make," and other critical comments of like nature. These comments are usually made by someone attempting to justify their beliefs and actions regardless of what the Bible has to say about them. However, the truth of the Gospel is humanly attainable and the Bible speaks candidly and frankly to that end.

Solomon wrote, "Buy the truth, and sell *it* not" (Pro. 23:23). The Truth is so objective and humanly attainable one may find it, possess it, know that one has it, and never let it go. Regarding Truth's attainability, Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

There is no way for a person to become a disciple of Christ if Truth is not humanly attainable. Jesus gave an acid test for discipleship; it is abiding in His Word. He did not say: "If you are sincere, it does not make any difference what you believe, and you will be my disciples anyway."

Peter wrote, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye* love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). The Holy Spirit through Peter made it clear that knowing and obeying the Truth is necessary for soul purification. Thus, if one cannot attain to the Truth of the Gospel to the point of knowing and obeying it, he remains yet in sin, impure, and lost.

If one cannot attain the Truth of the Gospel, Paul's rebuke of Peter and his censure of the Galatian churches of Christ is absurd. If Gospel Truth is not humanly attainable, on what grounds could Paul have made to Peter and others the following rebuke?

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed....But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to **the truth of the gospel**, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. 2: 11, 14).

Furthermore, Paul pointedly asked the Galatians: “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth” (Gal. 3:1)? Again, the apostle asked, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal. 5:7)? The preceding questions are ludicrous to the “nth” degree if the Galatians could not attain the Truth and know they had it.

If Truth is not humanly attainable, it is impossible to worship God. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

It is obvious from this passage that there are worshipers whom Jesus called true worshipers and worship that is true worship. But, how can such be unless Truth is humanly attainable?

The psalmist declared, “O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD *endureth* for ever. Praise ye the LORD” (Psa. 117:1-2). Please notice that inspiration declares that “the truth of the LORD *endureth* for ever.” God has given us His Truth, it is on man’s level of understanding, and it will remain forever. Indeed, God’s Truth is accessible, attainable, and one may know he/she has attained it.

Because of the absolute nature of Truth, the Lord’s church must be dogmatic in the proclamation and defense of the same. There is no room for wavering. The secular and religious world needs to know that moral and religious Truth has been settled for all time (Jude 3; Gal. 1:6-9; John 12:48). Hence, the church must be intolerant of any attempts to change God’s Truth. Relativist preachers parading falsely under the banner of “Gospel Preachers,” who advocate a neutral view of what is right and wrong, must be exposed and marked. Their doctrine advocates and promotes indecision, no conviction, and a compromising attitude. Because they believe that the Truth about salvation is not attainable, they preach

nonsensical contradictions. However, because God's Truth is absolute, constant, eternally right, and never varying faithful children of God have an anchor most sure and steadfast (1 Cor. 15:58).

HOW TO DESTROY THE INFLUENCE OF TRUTH IN YOUR LIFE

Truth is destroyed when men add to, alter, or subtract from it (Rev. 22:18-19). Being that Truth is just what a thing is, men change the Truth to error when they alter it in any fashion. Therefore, there is no need for human conventions, synods, conferences and councils, and the prayer books, manuals, and catechisms such legislative bodies produce to speak for God. God's legislation (saving Truth) is found in the Bible and only in the Bible. God instructed Moses, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it" (Deu. 4:2). When we reject some truth of the Bible because we do not like it, we are subtracting from the Bible.

When we pervert something, we change it from one thing to another. Paul said to the Galatians that some among them would "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). A perverted (twisted) gospel will not save. Neither will our **interpretation** of the gospel judge us. What the gospel really teaches will judge us (John 12:48).

Bible Truth is God's exclusive means to salvation for man. The wise man is the one who hears and obeys the Truth (Mat. 7:24-25). Our souls are purified only when we obey the Truth (1 Pet. 1:22). Thus, only the Truth makes men free (John 8:32). Persons who do not believe and obey the gospel will be lost in hell (Mark 16:15-16; 2 The. 1:7-9; 2:10-12).

In the light of the preceding material we understand why Paul declared that we dare not preach any thing else. We are under the curse of God if we do (Gal. 1:6-9). Some say that doctrine is not important; only a pious state of mind is what counts. Indeed, we must have a proper attitude toward God, but we must also have the right disposition of mind toward God's Word. If not, we do not have a correct attitude toward the Truth of the Gospel.

TRUTH MUST BE DEFENDED

It is a sin not to defend the Truth. Truth many times suffers in the house of its *friends*. Jude exhorted the brethren to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3—ASV). A Christian must understand that God expects us to regard

ourselves as combatants. To *earnestly* combat error is to do it with great intensity. We are to be Christian soldiers who are willing and prepared to fight for the Truth of the Gospel.

As Paul we must be “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phi. 1:16). This obligation is also emphasized by Peter when he wrote of being “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). *Answer* in this passage translates a Greek word meaning “to make a defense.”

Our Lord exemplified this defense in his earthly ministry. Jesus Christ was a controversialist. He was ever ready under proper circumstances to debate the Truth. The apostle Paul, who followed our Lord as closely as any mortal, was ready, willing, and constantly engaged in debating. There is no reason to believe that all of the apostles and faithful first century evangelists did not conduct themselves accordingly.

It is very important to preach to church members about godly living. However, the church has become very lax about publicly dealing with denominational and skeptical errors. We say little to upset the denominations, the various kinds of skeptics, and those who advocate false standards of morality. We must change or fail in our efforts to convert men to Christ.

It is impossible to love the Truth without learning how to think correctly (logically) regarding it. To arrive at the truth on anything we must have adequate evidence and/or credible witnesses. We are commanded to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21). The apostle John wrote his gospel from the perspective of proving the Deity of Christ (John 20:30-31). Without going into detail, for obvious reasons, we have adequate evidence and credible witnesses establishing the truth that Jesus Christ is Deity. Thus, we must gather all the evidence and reason correctly with it before we can draw the correct conclusion. With regularity our Lord, Paul, and others demonstrated the use of logic (the science of correct reasoning) in their defense of the Truth (Mat. 21:23-27; 22:41-45; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:7). Those rejecting the principles of sound reasoning can never give proper reasons for believing what they do.

GOD’S TRUTH—MAN’S ONLY HOPE

The truth of the gospel is the only hope for sinful mankind. Yet there is so much indifference toward religion—even among those who claim

to be religious. Indeed, this is the case with many within the church of Christ. In many cases those who oppose the Truth are openly antagonistic toward the Truth. Are we prepared to meet their challenges? We should be, because we have the Truth of the Gospel. It is fully capable of turning a wicked world on its end (Acts 17:6). The gospel is God's power to save persons lost in sin. It has proven that it can do it because of the sinners it has converted (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). The church of the first century was not ignored by the world. By what they believed and practiced (the Truth of the Gospel) they upset people. The church, therefore, was hated or loved.

The faithful of the first century were not deceived into believing that they should not hurt anyone's feelings. Today, the church must return to the same love of the Truth exhibited by the faithful who are recorded on the pages of the New Testament. When we do, we will have the same zeal, fearlessness, and fervor in advocating and defending the cause of Christ that the faithful first century church did. It will have the same effect on the world as it did then. Let us not be lead by modern psychologists, but by Jesus, Paul, the other apostles, and faithful evangelists of which we read in the New Testament. In following their example we will preach the positive and negative matters of the gospel. Thereby we shall preach all the council of God for the right reason and in the correct way. "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8).

WE MUST RESPECT THE TRUTH AS TO WHO IS AND WHO IS NOT IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Only those persons who are in fellowship with God are authorized to be in fellowship with others who are in fellowship with God. Only those who have complied with the Truth of the Bible regarding what is necessary to be in fellowship with God are in fellowship with Him. The Bible clearly teaches that those persons who have obeyed the instructions of Christ set out in the New Testament are in fellowship with God. The persons who have obeyed the instructions of Christ are those who have believed in Christ, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and have been baptized (in water) into Christ to obtain the remission of sins (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; Mat. 28:18-19; Rom. 6:3-4; 6:17-18; Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27). This is the truth regarding who is in fellowship with God and thus in the church of Christ (Acts

2:47; Eph. 1:3). Thereby, **we understand the Truth of God's law of inclusion.**

Persons who refuse to comply with God's law of inclusion must not be accepted as faithful members of the Lord's church. **This is God's law of exclusion.** Moreover, those in the church who refuse to live according to the Lord's Truth regarding Christian living are not acceptable to faithful brethren (Mat. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:2-13). Any attempt to have unity without the authorized means to that end is foreign to the truth of God's laws of exclusion and inclusion. Only that which is done by the authority of God's Will is acceptable (Col. 3:17; 2 John 9-11; Tit. 3:10-11). Thus, all those persons who refuse to submit to the Truth regarding becoming a Christian and living the Christian life are to be excluded from the fellowship of the church.

Very briefly we have noticed God's laws of inclusion and exclusion. These laws are the truth of the matter regarding whom is and who is not in fellowship with God. Moreover, we have seen what true unity is and what it is not. Let the faithful remain separated from all those who refuse the Truth regarding God's laws of inclusion and exclusion. The **liberal** mind desires to include those who repudiate the Truth of God regarding being in fellowship with him. The "**anti**" desires to exclude from fellowship those who are in fellowship with God. Let us labor not to be found in either camp.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH

What the Bible teaches about the church must be accepted. Why is this the case? Because what the Bible teaches about anything is the truth. The church is like Jesus Christ, her builder, in that she is unique and distinct (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23). When the church gives up the biblical principles and attitudes that set her apart from human religions, she gives up her power and ceases to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mat. 5:13-16). She ceases to be sanctified (John 17:17). When the church forfeits the Truth of the Bible she becomes just another false human religion. Therefore, the church must remain unique: distinct in its organization, work, life, and worship. Only by the church sustaining an intense loyalty to the Truth of God can she accomplish this. Let us therefore, notice certain biblical truths that keep the church distinct and separate from the world and false religions.

1. The church has a distinctive head—Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18).

2. The church is unique because of her origin and purpose (Eph. 3:8-11).
 - a. Only the church of Christ had its origin in the mind of God.
 - b. Only the church of Christ has her reality within His eternal purposes.
 - c. Every religious organization exists because some person lived.
 - d. Only the church of Christ exists because of Jesus Christ.
3. The church of Christ is distinct because it is nonsectarian in nature.
 - a. God's will unifies all men in the church (1 Cor. 14:33).
 - b. The Truth of Christ orders men not to be sectarian (1 Cor. 1:10).
 - c. Only the church of Christ pleads for scriptural (the truth about) unity (John 17:20-21).
4. The church of Christ is distinct because of the message she preaches and defends (Rom. 1:16).
 - a. To be faithful to Christ the church of Christ must preach the gospel (Mark 16:15).
 - b. She has no authority to preach another kind of gospel other than the one found on the pages of the New Testament (Gal. 1:9).
 - c. As the church of the first century was the pillar and ground of the truth, so must the church of Christ today be the same (1 Tim. 3:15).
 - d. What the apostle Paul taught to Timothy must be taught by the church today (2 Tim. 2:2).
5. The church of Christ of which we read in our New Testaments was distinct because she was committed to evangelizing the whole world (Mark 16:15-16: Mat. 28:18-19).
 - a. Evangelizing the world is not an option. Paul said, "woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).
 - b. All Christians must realize that wherever we live on the earth we are in a place that needs the gospel (Mat. 13:88).
6. The church of Christ is unique because of her unwavering stand for the Truth (Jude 3).

- a. Christians are not faithful if they do not: “Fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12).
 - b. As the church “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), she is unwilling to compromise in doctrine or practice no matter what the cost.
7. The Lord’s church is distinct because her members live holy and pure lives (Eph. 1:4; 5:27).
- a. The church compromises the Truth when she ceases to hate “even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23).
 - b. Part of pure religion is “keep[ing] himself unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27).
8. The willingness to sacrifice and deny self makes the church distinct.
- a. The church is subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24).
 - b. She is, therefore, to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; Mat. 16:24).
 - c. Members of the church are “living sacrifice[s], holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12:1).
9. The uniqueness of the church of Christ is seen in her members’ love, compassion, and forgiveness.
- a. Every member of Christ’s body realizes they are what they are “by the grace of God” (1 Cor. 15:10).
 - b. Paul admonished the Colossian church not to be harsh, caustic, and unmerciful (Col. 3:12-14).
 - c. We must follow the example of Christ in His dealing with others (1 Pet. 2:21).
10. The church of Christ is distinctive because of her hope (expectation coupled with an earnest desire to receive) heaven.
- a. The Bible teaches explicitly and by implication that only the faithful members of the church of Christ will inhabit heaven (Eph. 5:27; 2 Pet. 1:11).
 - b. All those outside of the church of Christ as well as those who die unfaithful to the Lord will be lost (2 The. 1:7-10; Rom. 1:16; Acts 2:47).

Imperative it is that Christians remember, teach, live, and contend for the Truth about the church.

WILL WE ACCEPT THE TRUTH?

People who love this present age do not love the truth (1 John 2:15-17; John 3:19). To love one is to hate the other. The prophet, Isaiah, wrote that certain ones of his day said, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). Many hold that same sentiment today. No matter the abundance of evidence properly set out, some are not going to accept the truth. Writing some 700 years after Isaiah, the apostle Paul declared of some who

received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 The. 2:10-12; also see Luke 8:15).

When one turns from the truth there is only one thing to which he turns—error.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The difference that makes a difference in the saved and the unsaved has nothing to do with superior intelligence or opportunities. The difference lies in their attitude toward the Gospel Truth. Because of superstition, ignorance, or prejudice we find ourselves unwilling to accept some truth. Notice that Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). Therefore, **there is a direct correlation between doing God's Will and understanding it.**

TRUTH ENDURES TO ALL GENERATIONS

Psalm 100:50

As has been stated innumerable times, the Lord's church is always only one generation away from apostasy (Jud. 2:7-13). There will never be a time for the faithful to cease their strong advocacy for and defense of the Truth. There will never be a time when the first principles and fundamentals of the Gospel of Christ will not be needed.

As long as time continues the forces of error will strive to crush the Truth of the Gospel. Hurricane winds composed of many errors are blowing full force through the church at present. Many are being blown off the course of Truth. Others are being torn from their moorings by the stormy winds of false doctrine. Sadly, some were never moored to the Truth very well in the first place. The only thing that can stop these

tempestuous winds of error is the truth of the Gospel. Like Noah of old the Lord's faithful must follow the Truth and not the crowd. With the love of the Truth proper respect for Bible authority will be created. Thereby obedience to God's Truth will naturally follow (John 15:14; 1 John 2:5; 5:3). Only then will peace reign (Mark 4:39; Rom. 5:1). What is our responsibility? To live, preach, and defend the truth of the Gospel, for it is the only power available to save anyone. That great Book of God, the Bible, will read on the Day of Judgement as it reads now (John 12:48). We, therefore, must not allow ourselves to be turned from it and thereby turned from the Truth.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

WHEN FELLOWSHIP IS BROKEN

GENESIS 3

Harrell Davidson



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955 and began preaching every Sunday in October, 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on *Marriage and The Christian Home* (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He has worked with the church in Obion, Tennessee for the past 16 years, which is only 20 miles from where he was born and raised.

Harrell is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock and they have four children—three boys and one girl.

SAD PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE

When brother Hatcher heard me mention Genesis 3 as being the saddest passage in all the Bible, his *wheels* began turning. I mentioned this in a lecture at the great Memphis School of Preaching in the Spring of 1999. That night, while we visited, he thought that he might have a lectureship on sad passages one year and then happy or glad passages another year. He appreciated the thought, and we left it at that. After he got clearance from the elders, *Sad Statements Of The Bible* was then determined to be the over-all topic for this first year of the new millennial. I realize that there are many sad passages in the Bible. However, none of them are as sad in my opinion as the one assigned to me.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

“The book of beginnings” is a very fascinating book by all standards. The first thing that Genesis provides for us is the knowledge of God. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).¹ The first verse in the Bible is our introduction to God. This is an indication of the simplicity and the breadth of the Scriptures. A child can read this verse and understand it. When philosophy has had its say, Genesis 1:1 still

stands out in its simplicity and in breadth that leaves nothing out. All philosophy is not bad. False philosophy will always be bad. God is and this verse states the fact. When men reject Genesis, they reject any kind of information relative to God, which is based upon revelation. The origin of the universe is here mapped out. Myths abound, but Genesis is the inspired account. "In the beginning God" is all we need. Notice your daily papers and see how foolish men are trying still to come up with the origin of the universe. Evolutionists are beginning to doubt each other and are arguing over the origin of the universe. God made the earth to be inhabited.

NASA, in vain, is still searching for life on other planets. The world is disillusioned about such feeble and puny efforts that drain the pocket books of the tax payers when the Bible is very distinctive in this regard and answers this age-old notion. Our society today is about like the Athenians in Acts 17. Paul went into Athens Greece to escape a mob (Acts 17:13-15). When he passed by their idols and altars, he saw one statue with the inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). He was very bold in his efforts to preach God to them. Where did he start? "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24). That is right! Paul started with God! How many of you have ever studied with an atheist? I have only studied with one. From this experience I can tell you that the place that you had better begin is with God in Genesis 1:1.

Paul said that God made everything including the world and all the things in the world. God did not make worldly things, but the things that the world needed to operate and function God made. The Deist is wrong when he states that there is a God, He made the world, and then became uninvolved or, if you please, stepped out of the picture. In Colossians 1:15-17 Paul said by inspiration:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:
For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:
And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Paul told his audience in Athens: “Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Men today need this lesson. We try to worship God today with our hands instead of our hearts. God has no need for hand worship. How did everything with life get that life? God! He put *breath* in all that needed breath. Our preacher now, brother Paul, solved a lot of problems that science and technology today is trying to get settled. He said, “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation”(Acts 17:26). Yes, my friend, God made the earth for man to dwell upon. Isaiah, perhaps the greatest prophet, said in the long ago:

For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: *I am* the LORD; and *there is* none else (Isa. 45:18).

What are you saying Isaiah? That God formed the earth; He established it for man’s habitation. That settles the question. There is no human life on any planet other than this earth. I will stand with what God said because I believe Genesis 1:1.

Genesis sets forth the origin of man. When this is rejected, man has no understanding of himself; he is nothing more than an animal. Now let us put this to a test. Block out of your mind the origin of man in Genesis; then blot out God and ask the question: “Who am I?” We do not know!

Genesis contains truths about God, the nature of God, the designs of God, the activities of God, and the truths of the methods of God. Genesis helps us see truths concerning man, his creation, responsibility, sin, and hope. Genesis gives us the truths regarding the human race, its origin, unity, division, and language. The book of Genesis is the only book where we can learn these truths concerning life, individual life, domestic, social and national life. This is one of the reasons we have the first 11 chapters of Genesis. Genesis 12 is a departure of things that precede the former.

Genesis 12 has as its background the first 11 chapters of Genesis. The rest of the Bible grows out of Genesis 12. From Genesis 12 looking back, we have the sin of Adam and in Noah’s generation we see God’s judgment against sin. Genesis emphasizes family life.

Genesis sets forth the home. Marriage and the family are introduced here. Outside of revelation marriage is a farce. The home is basic to

society. It was the breakdown of the home that led to the flood. When the home is broken down, there are consequences affecting the whole world. Genesis sets forth the fundamental value of work. There is a growing understanding of the need to work at something. People have the need of being useful.

Genesis gives us the origin of the races and the origin of languages. Linguists tell us that the only reasonable explanation of languages is Genesis 11.

Genesis helps us understand the entrance of evil into the world. This author does not believe that Genesis sets forth the origin of evil. It sets forth its entrance among men in Genesis 3. It says, "Here it is." Apart from Genesis 3 we would have no indication of sin. It is the most tragic chapter in all the Bible.

AN INTRODUCTION TO GOD

Every book of the Bible bears some relationship to the one preceding it and the one following it. However, nothing preceded Genesis but Deity. The rest of the Bible depends on the book of Genesis. We are told that *God* in Genesis 1:1 is plural. This indicates that there is more than one in the world. In Genesis 1:2, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," we now see another person in the Godhead of Genesis 1:1—that is "the Spirit of God" or the Holy Spirit. All the way down, past the first five days of creation, we notice Genesis 1:26 that God extends Himself even further.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

This includes the Son as John 1:1-3 indicates. Are we not impressed when we read the first chapter in the Holy Bible that *God* is found 26 times in 31 verses? Notice also that "and God said" is found at least nine times in Genesis chapter 1. These facts ought to arrest our attention!

The things contained in Genesis chapters 1-3 may be summed up this way. Chapter one is an introduction to God. Chapter two tells of man's place in the world and his responsibility, his fellowship with God, and man being created for fellowship both with God and others. It is man in relation to his environment.

Chapter 3 presents the entrance and essence of sin. This writer is not convinced that the Bible gives us a great deal of information regarding the origin of sin. Genesis 1:1 begins with time, not before creation. We create problems of various sorts when we begin to try to figure out what was in the mind of God before creation. Many false doctrines develop by man trying to make rules before God was ever announced to the world. John Calvin was just such a fellow. He said something similar to this: "God in His eternal councils before the world ever began." This is foolishness gone to seed! The first knowledge we have of sin is what is set forth in Genesis 3. The idea is for us to see how sin works (not to give us the origin of it), the consequences of it, and how sin affected man's life in relationship to God, others, the earth, and his environment. The Bible was not intended as a detailed discussion of the history of man but to set forth the principles of redemption. Genesis 1 and 2 give us the background. Genesis 3 shows redemption needed. Genesis 4 portrays the working out of the struggle of the righteous seed and the unrighteous seed in Cain and Abel. We do not know how many children Adam and Eve had at this time, but these two are given to help us see the struggle on both sides. It is folly to argue where Cain got his wife. That is not the purpose of the Bible. God announces facts, and we must accept them by faith.

GOD AND MAN

"And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Man was made from the dust of the ground on the sixth day. Theistic evolutionists claim that there are maybe three or four million years involved in the days of creation. Let us examine some facts.

Man was created on the sixth day. Let us assume that Adam was then about three million years old because the argument is made that each day was a long geological period of time. God rested on the seventh day (cf., Gen. 2:2.) Here is another three million years or so. Man lived at least into the eighth day. Seems to me that by now he is getting quite old!

This is folly! God created man and woman on the sixth day, and all of these days were solar days with an evening and morning being one day.

Man came from (was created by) God Almighty. His name was Adam. Adam named all the creatures that God had made, and there was no suitable helpmeet among the animal kingdom. God knew this and took

a rib and made woman: “And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man” (Gen. 2:23). She was made from man and he from dust.

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:8-9).

Please focus on verse nine. God made to grow **every** tree that was pleasant to man’s eyes. Those trees were *good for food* and pleasant to look at. The tree of *life* was also in Eden, and the tree of *knowledge* of good and *evil*. This author does not know if we can comprehend the sweet fellowship that God and man had together. We read in chapter 3 of Genesis that “the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). Are we to assume that this was the only meeting between God and man? This scribe does not think so! We are not told how often nor when God met His creation in Eden. We do know that man was in full fellowship with God at this point in time. Further, we do not know how many years this fellowship lasted. Very possibly there were children born in the garden. Cain found a wife who had to have existed from somewhere. However, he was warned that the daughter of man could have been born after the closure of the Paradise of God. Yes Paradise! You see the group of seventy known as the Septuagint translated *garden* in Genesis 2:8 *paradise*. This author believes that he does no wrong by calling it the Paradise of God for man. Think about the most beautiful garden that you have ever seen. Our efforts totally fail us in understanding the beauty and magnificence of the Garden of Eden. Everything that man needed was right there. He did not have to run in to town to the grocery for supplies. He did not have to be concerned about his living whatsoever. He had the Creator on his right and left hand to see that their needs were supplied. What a wonderful place the Garden must have been. It was so special in every way. Our senses cannot behold it as could Adam and Eve’s.

GOD GAVE THEM A COMMAND

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

“Simple enough,” we say, and maybe rightfully so. Now enter king Satan in the form of a serpent, and the whole world is about to change. “Yea, hath God said” the serpent asked in Genesis 3:1. If Satan can get us to doubt God, then he has half of the battle won. Eve was not tricked; she was not forced. She did not have to commit sin. However, she saw all the good things that the trees were originally made for by God, but now with a twist. The devil has truth twisted into a lie. It is appalling that the very things that God gave our progenitors that were good, they corrupted it. Think back about the trees and their fruit.

GOD SAID YOU SHALL SURELY DIE

Was she not listening? Sure she was! What has happened? She is being tempted by Satan himself. A liar and a murderer from right here in the beginning. He lied to her, and she swallowed it hook, line, and sinker! She gave to Adam, and he also ate. This became the saddest day in the history of mankind. God that created man has been refused. His command has been broken. No one can sin against God with impunity. Man was driven out of the Paradise of God into a common land much like we know today. Yes, there is beauty in our land, but nothing to compare with the beauty of Eden and the sweet full fellowship with God in the cool of the day or whenever they chose. That is finished—over—done—finis! Man has been successful in corrupting that which was good and wholesome in every way. Entering into the world were such things as murder, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, man lying with animals for his sexual favors, lying, stealing, hate, jealousy, and the list goes on and on and on. How disgusting the whole thing is.

PURPOSE AND PROMISE

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This is the purpose, while in Genesis 12:1-3 we read the promise. The result of sin is then before. Man is separated from God. Isaiah said of old:

Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

When God told Adam that he would surely die, He meant it. The very minute, even second, that they ate the forbidden fruit they died then and

there spiritually, though they lived hundreds of years longer physically. They were separated from the presence of God. Their son became a murderer. Sins multiplied and they still do.

The purpose and promise are announced because of sin, and people are watching and waiting. Salvation is purposed in Genesis 3:15. In Genesis 12 we have the promise of salvation. Faith and blood will be necessary for man's redemption—all because he fell away from God. As long as sin was absent with Adam and Eve, they could meet directly with God. Why in the world would they give this up for spiritual death? When they sinned, a different situation developed and God met them (man) only in certain designated places. In the tabernacle the people had to come and offer their sacrifice at the door of the tabernacle because this is where the presence of God was. Mediation had to come about because man could no longer address God directly; they had to have a go-between. The day of atonement was the greatest day in the Jewish calendar because of sin. Look what Adam and Eve caused to happen. Man is reminded in Deuteronomy to love God with his whole heart and to serve Him from the heart. Adam and Eve failed. Atonement became necessary for man to have any fellowship with God. God told the children of Israel that they would have vineyards and houses that they did not build or plant, and God said beware lest you forget God. It is obvious that Adam and Eve forgot about God.

Man has four basic needs to religion: (1) A priest to represent man before God. This was not needed until sin entered into the world. When sin came, man needed someone to go to God for him for sin separated man from God; (2) A sacrifice to approach God. Beginning with Abel all the way down to Christ man had to have a sacrifice. Think of the millions of gallons of animal blood that was shed because of their sins. These sacrifices had to be repeated over and over again because they could not atone completely for sin, or else the sacrifice would have been offered once; (3) Man needs a prophet to reveal God to him. In order for man to have a knowledge of the mind of God he would need someone to reveal such to him. God operated directly to Noah, Abram, and others. Finally, after Moses, God worked only through the prophets. One hand is God; the other is man. There is something that is needed for man to know God. Man needed a revelation of redemption. Before sin, this problem did not exist. Samuel had the school of prophets. There were

also oral prophets. They made known the mind of God to man, but they wrote nothing. All of this fuss resulted because man sinned; (4) A king to control his life. It is important that we understand that God intends to be the ruler of our lives. He never had an original plan for man to have a king so they could be like other people. This came about because of sin being introduced into the world. These things we have all the way to Christ. Melchizedek and Aaron typified the priest. The sacrifices from Abel go all the way to the cross.

Finally, my Lord would be crucified because of man's sin in Genesis 3. "Mine eye runneth down with water" (Lam. 1:16). This author can say no more. This was the day when fellowship with God was broken.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY” GENESIS 6:5

Terry M. Hightower



Terry Hightower is a native of Winter Haven, Florida. He is married to the former Vicki McCullough. They have two children, Kacy and Bret.

Terry preached his first sermon while attending Junior College in 1968. He graduated with honors from Polk Community College and Harding College; has an M.A. from Harding Graduate School of Religion in Philosophy of Religion and Apologetics. He has taught in Bible Chairs in Florida and Wyoming and ten years at Florida School of Preaching. Arranged the Warren-Matson Debate held in 1978.

Terry has written articles for several publications. In 1983 he published the book, *The Case For The Christian Policeman*, which deals with the “war question,” and in 1987 he debated Gary Workman on this subject. He also edited *Christ The Controversialist*. He has done local work in Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas.

INTRODUCTION

Mankind reminds me of the man who attempted to siphon gasoline from a motor home on a Seattle street, who got much more than he bargained for. Police arrived at the scene to find an ill man curled up next to a motor home near spilled sewage. The man admitted to trying to steal gasoline and that he had plugged his siphon hose into the motor home’s sewage waste tank by mistake. The owner of the vehicle declined to press charges, saying that it was the best laugh he had ever had. At least this man did not die from his crime, but unfortunately sin is no laughing matter to our Holy God who not only can but will “press charges” (Jam. 2:10). “Fools make a mock at sin” (Pro. 14:9—KJV).

It was sad when Adam and Eve broke their individual fellowship with Jehovah, but can it get even worse? Yes! Here is one of the saddest Bible statements ever written: “And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).¹ It was sad indeed, for such broke God’s heart (Gen. 6:6b) and forced Him to say: “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground; both man, and beast,

and creeping things, and birds of the heavens; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7). Though He promises that He will never again destroy the world by water, He emphatically warns us all that “the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7). “And as *were* the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man!” (Mat. 24:37). When I was growing up in the 50s, we seldom locked our doors except at night, but now we live in a time in which signs are posted on businesses and homes that read: “WARNING: Attack dog on premises 5 out of 7 nights—you guess which 5!”

RADICAL EVIL IN SOUL AND SOCIETY

When you read Genesis 6:5 and think of wickedness and violence, what comes to mind? Scoffers and “mythmakers” of the Bible fail to perceive that the Scriptures perfectly describe man’s nature and consequent actions growing therefrom! Thus, unbelievers make “F minuses” in Anthropology 101 and have concocted all sorts of human theories to explain away sin such as genetic and/or environmental determinism! In their human philosophy and vain deceit (Col. 2:8) they wrongly view man as an evolving beast who can be manipulated into moral improvement without God. As a Christian, though, you probably think of the incredible things you hear and see through the media and truly realize the radical evil in man’s soul and our society.

Do you think of WW II’s gas ovens in Germany and the death of over six million Jews, of the hatred, mayhem, bloodshed, agony, and death in Stalinist Russia, or Maoist China? Do you think of Jeffrey Dahmer who involved young men in homosexual acts, murdered them, dissected and cannibalized their bodies, and then buried them nearby? Do you think of the man on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, who took a five-year-old girl behind a fence and raped her while several cars stopped on the freeway with the drivers cheering the rapist on? Do you think of the bloody ethnic wars raging worldwide which fill our newspapers and magazines daily with photographs of mutilated bodies slaughtered children, strewn across open fields and city squares?

Do you think of the 40 million tiny, helpless babies in America, mercilessly killed since 1973 in what ought to be the safest place in the world—their mother’s womb? Do you think of (Salon webzine’s homo-

sexual activist) Dan Savage, who posed as one of presidential candidate Gary Bauer's (as he put it) "gay bashing" Iowa campaign volunteers and then reported that he started licking doorknobs. The front door, office doors, even a bathroom door. When that was done, he started in on the staplers, phones, and computer keyboards. Then stood in the kitchen and licked the rims of all the clean coffee cups drying in the rack, finally licking a pen just before his heterophobic hand gave it to Mr. Bauer! Paul flashes us back to the days of Noah when, just after mentioning the vile passions of sodomites and lesbians, he says:

And even as they refused to have God in *their* knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful (Rom. 1:28-31).

Still not convinced that the Bible tells it like it really is? Then did you think of the 21-year-old Bronx man who was so stoned on crack that when he no longer could stand her crying, he killed his six-month-old baby, carried her into the kitchen, took out a butcher knife, cut her into pieces, fed her body parts to his two hungry Rottweiler dogs, and then afterwards went calmly back to sleep? No wonder we hate to pick up a newspaper anymore! "And every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." May God help us to ring out the message that sin is an anthropological fact about humans (and only humans) which must be explained biblically as to its reality, origin, and significance.

Whose Glory Is in Their Shame **Philippians 3:19**

Do we today deserve any less than what the world of Noah's day received? Paul's indictment of both Jews and Greeks still applies to us, as does his explanation of its real cause.

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none that understandeth, There is none that seeketh after God; They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not, so much as one: Their throat is an open sepulchre; With their tongues they have used deceit: The poison of asps is under

their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes (Rom. 3:9-18).

Jeffrey Bezos was chosen as *Time* magazine’s choice as “Man Of The Year,” and, had he lived during the time described in Genesis 6, he would have helped Jehovah say: “My spirit shall not strive with man for ever” (Gen. 6:3). Chairman of the huge book company Amazon.com, Bezos refused the American Family Association’s request that he discontinue selling books that promote adult-child sex and human-animal sex relations. Think of it, folks! The most defenseless of God’s creations are fair game under Bezos’ staunch defense of the sale of self-help and instruction manuals for incest, pedophilia, and bestiality! With titles offered like *The Horseman: Obsessions Of A Zoophile* and *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality* and described online as including “wonderful and diverse color illustrations of zoophilia,” the apostle Paul would describe them as those “whose glory is in their shame” (Phi. 3:19)! Amazon reviewed online its *Father Daughter Incest* volume as “probably the best book there is on father-daughter incest” and said about *Daddy: An Erotic Memoir* that it was about “a father’s searing confession of the forbidden love affair with his daughters.” Amazon claims that they cannot act, of course, as censors. Their job is to provide *selection*, and, since those kind of books and people are in the world, they then allege it is the prerogative of such persons to read and act so!

Since the Bible teaches us that sexual wickedness destroys the home as God would have it (Gen. 4:19, 23-24; 6:3) and stems from a deeper corruption within one’s thoughts, such is a mark of the imminent collapse of civilization reflected in violence. Wickedness is simply the absence of the life of God at work in human society.

America is a country devoid of moral values, with no absolute truths to tell us how to live. The problem runs deeper than the need for more police, better laws, and tougher punishment. The conscience of America is dying, and that’s why we have crimes without motives, crime as sport, running rampant through the streets of America. Crime in America has a new face. No longer do we see only hate, greed, or envy as motives. Young people with no motive or reason commit many of today’s crimes, and who show no remorse afterward. Murder is sport; crime is just for fun.

Charles Partee wrote: “As is true everywhere, the most dangerous animal in Africa is the savage beast called man. For all kinds of reasons, and for no reason, this cruel predator will attack those who intend him no harm, bear him no malice, and pose him no threat. This animal will even kill those of his own species who desire only his happiness and wish for nothing more than the opportunity to love and serve him.” Every time moral values are broken down in a society, chaos follows. History shows that no country can survive long without a strong moral code, and no strong moral code exists apart from God. When moral values break down, society disintegrates.²

Are We in the Pre-FIRE Instead of Pre-FLOOD Days?

Have we reached the end Ezekiel declares about ancient Israel:

Behold, the day, behold, it cometh: thy doom is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness; none of them *shall remain*, nor of their multitude, nor of their wealth: neither shall there be eminency among them (Eze. 7:10-11)?

Concerning the Western world view:

the reality is that millions of people, though blessed by material abundance and dynamic options in life, still seek liberation from their personal enslavement to habits and from pursuits that have brought disintegration within and fragmentation without....While we prowl and scavenge relentlessly through a variety of lifestyles in search of that all-fulfilling treasure, we seem to have forgotten that this hyperactive pursuit and empty-hearted feeling are not new to the human experience. The Bible, through the prophet Haggai, called upon the people of his day to take note of their indulgences, which were also attended by diminishing returns.³

God says:

Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes (Hag. 1:5-6).

DID THEY COMPARTMENTALIZE MORALITY IN NOAH’S DAY, TOO?

Some people, even members of the church, wring their hands and say, “Ain’t it awful,” and then view it all as *politics* instead of involving the very roots of the American order.⁴ Is this so they can vote as accustomed without pricking their conscience for their traditional political party even if its written platform is “pro-gay” and “pro-choice”? While many indi-

viduals would not personally commit the wickedness, even the religious man or woman can sin in their "consent with them that practise them" (Rom. 1:32; 2 John 10-11) in their doomed attempt to "compartmentalize" morality into public and private sectors. Mom and Dad, you know Congress did it during the last Presidential impeachment proceedings, but have you read of the 850 ministers and other religious workers endorsing the SIECUS declaration on sexual morality which blesses same-sex couples?⁵ SIECUS even brags how this was developed by over 20 different theologians from diverse traditions and signed by members of 25 denominations. I wonder if some of Noah's pre-Flood *religious* friends wrote as did the United Church of Christ's former president Paul H. Sherry that his church is "gifted by gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons who have found love in the physical, emotional, and spiritual embrace of another"?⁶ We surely must cry with Jeremiah:

In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; and they strengthen the hands of evil-doers, so that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them become unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (Jer. 23:14).

By God's Spirit, Paul declared that we have no fellowship with such "unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them; for the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of" (Eph. 5:11-12). Christian, when was the last time you reprovved **anybody** other than perhaps your own family? One hears the echo of presidential candidate Alan Keyes as R. B. Y. Scott writes:

The judgments of God are manifest in the world of today. The time has come to bring home to men that these are right judgments on human sin; that men bear these consequences inevitably, because they are morally responsible beings who have denied their own nature in denying their responsibility to their neighbors.⁷

All opposition to God's Word is defiance to reality whereby one opposes what is (ultimately) best for oneself (Acts 18:6; Luke 7:30), and this is a form of insanity: "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that *they go to the dead*" (Ecc. 9:3).

Bible Anthropology Is Totally Accurate!

Do you not see the infinite accuracy of Genesis 6:5 in regard to (1) the true origin and objective nature of man's depravity, and (2) the extent to

which it can go? We must not allow perversions of the truth by either scoffing, hypocritical relativists (who needs the Moral Argument⁸ personally applied to them so as to enable them to acknowledge God!), or by Calvinists (in our possible overreaction to their view of Total Depravity) to cause us to fail to recognize the depth to which man can become corrupt. Make no mistake as to the cruciality of Bible doctrine here! I have personally asked atheistic or agnostic professors: “Sir, since you say that there is no such thing as absolute truth and right and wrong, under what circumstances could and would you rape and then murder your own two year-old daughter (or son)?” They will **never** answer such, much less attempt an explanation of when evil began on this planet! Hypocrite Peter Singer, Princeton’s much ballyhooed philosopher who teaches that we have the moral obligation to kill the aged and infirm because they consume far too much of our medical resources, has a mother with Alzheimer’s disease. By his definition she is therefore no longer a *person*, yet at great personal expense he pays for round-the-clock health care for her. Singer’s rules of morality only apply to other people’s mothers!

On the other hand, though they are theists who accept the Bible as God’s Word, I have had Calvinists inform me that, when a baby cries in his crib, it is because he is a little sinner “whom the Devil is in”! Do you not see how that everything humanity really cares about and everything we teach as Christians (including the proper definition of sin itself) hinges upon the truth of Genesis? A failure to recognize the truth of our “sad statement of the Bible” destroys Christianity, which is its only antidote! Perhaps this is the reason our Lord Himself affirms the reality of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve (Mat. 19:4-6), the actuality of Noah’s ark and the Flood (Luke 17:26-27), the *safe* nature of little children (Mat. 18:1-3), and yet recognized not only the **origin** of man’s sin (Mat. 15:18-19; Mark 7:23) but also the hardened **extent** of corruptness to which accountable men could fall (Mat. 12:33-34; Mark 6:52b; 8:17b).

When Lyle Reloaded

We today exist in a hauntingly similar culture, that for the most part has lost the belief in moral reality (i.e., the notion that there exists a transcendent and objective moral order to which we are all responsible). In the wake of the anti-God philosophies of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris at Columbine, are there signs that people are getting a wake-up

call about evil? Talk show host Maury Povich interviewed some contract killers and reported to a researcher that until recently people excused such criminal acts by blaming such “psychological preconditioners” such as child abuse. Povich, however, said that people were no longer buying these (humanistic) self-exonerating theories as they once had and that he could even pinpoint the moment of change: *When Lyle reloaded*.

What did he mean by that? He was referring to Lyle Menendez, who, having emptied his shotgun into his parents, watched his mother crawl in her own blood as she begged him to spare her life. Instead, he went out of the room, reloaded his gun, and came back to calmly finish her off. That, said Povich, was the turning point for most viewers of his program. They knew this defied reason....In observing the players behind the violent scenes, viewers began to wonder about the callous and relentless greed that surfaced on the part of those who capitalized on crime. They were completely dumbfounded when they became aware of the money that was being made by opportunists who were marketing Jeffrey Dahmer trading cards and other gimmick-laden products!⁹

Who Is at Fault?

One who accepts the biblical view of mankind will not be so humanistically dumbfounded despite the fact that our *Psycho* psychologists try to catalog every evil as a mere “mental illness” or “alternate lifestyle”! I just recently learned not to say “psychopath,” but rather (no kidding!) “sociopath who suffers from Antisocial Personality Disorder” (APD). While Hillary Clinton blamed her husband’s infidelities on the stress he endured as a child, we actually have a new school of evolutionary *shrinks* arguing that even rape is hard-wired into male genes in their Darwinian need to reproduce at all costs! If comedian Flip Wilson were around today he would say, “Darwin made me do it!”

The Bible teaches that accountable humans **freely choose** to commit horrible sins! The Lord told the sinful woman, “go thy way; from henceforth sin no more” (John 8:11). He did not lie to her and say: “It was in your genes or caused by your environment!” As Gilkey said:

Sin may be defined as an ultimate religious devotion to a finite interest; it is an overriding loyalty or concern for the self, its existence and its prestige, or for the existence and prestige of a group. From this deeper sin, that is, from this inordinate love of the self and its own, stem the moral evils of indifference, injustice, prejudice, and cruelty to one’s neighbor, and the other destructive patterns of actions that we call sins.¹⁰

See 1 John 3:4, Romans 4:15, and James 1:13-16; 4:1-5!

The Calvinist Alternative Is No Better

Yet, Calvinists insist that Adam's original sin is extended to all mankind; so (1) even infants are *infected*, and (2) this alleged "inborn corruption" leaves all mankind utterly "without the ability to make right choices in the spiritual realm."¹¹ Jesus taught that sinners must become as little children (Mat. 18:2; 19:13-15), but John Calvin claimed that infants bring their own damnation with them from their mothers' wombs, that the moment they are born their natures are *odious* to God! Biblically, sin is something which one does himself in transgressing God's law (1 John 3:4; Rom. 3:23; 4:15; 14:12; Isa. 53:6; Psa. 14:3; Eze. 18:20; Deu. 24:16; Jer. 17:10). It originates inside, in the internal will of his mind just as so sadly described in Genesis 6:5, and unfortunately can go further to culminate in outward, physical action. Little babies are born sinless (Heb. 12:9; Zec. 12:1; Ecc. 12:7; Acts 17:28) and then can commit sin when they grow into accountability (Deu. 1:39; Eze. 28:15; Isa. 7:16; 53:6; Rom. 7:9; 9:11; Jon. 4:11). While the secular humanist may additionally try to ascribe man's actions to "environmental determinism," if he and the Calvinistic **theist** lay the blame to Genetics, then they are **both** dead wrong! Scripture denies this "destined from the cradle" viewpoint.

Genesis 6:5 Is Hyperbole

Though contradictory to their notion of Total Depravity, even some Calvinists admit that

this description of antediluvian man in verse 5 (also in verses 1-13) can hardly be correctly applied to all men everywhere. Outward wickedness is certainly not "great" in the case of every self-righteous unbeliever, nor do any but the most depraved imagine "only evil continually."¹²

A *hyperbole* is simply a figure of speech employing poetic license to denote a "throwing beyond" actual reality, an intentional exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis.¹³ It is not a falsehood! It is sad that Calvinists recognize it here in Genesis 6:5 and miss it in Psalm 51:2-5 and 58:3. I still pray for the preacher who, when writing on hyperbole, said in a reference to me: "I have often thought that Terry 'would talk until his tongue *turned every color in the rainbow* and then simply refuse to utter another word'!...That may not only be hyperbolizing, but wishful

thinking, too!" Since I hardly talk at all, you see that this brother really knew his "hyperbole." It is crucial to recognize that hyperbole is normally involved in expressing a *deep emotion* so we are not surprised that the verse following our sad text says, "it repented Jehovah that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen. 6:6).

We first must attempt to understand the figure as literal, and then recognize that various clues will exist in the immediate and/or remote context which demonstrate that a literal interpretation is out of harmony with such. Genesis 6:5 (or 6:13) cannot be regarded as literal for the following reasons: (1) No one would claim that the patriarch had never committed a sin, but the fact remains that if "Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah...Noah was a righteous man, *and* perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:8-9) and seven others were also saved by so walking, then Noah was **not** constantly wicked nor thinking evil thoughts (nor was his family); (2) We can assume that humans sleep at certain times and since only conscious, controllable thoughts are held against us (Jon. 4:11b; Acts 13:45-46; John 7:17; Mat. 23:37b; John 9:41; Luke 12:47-48), that not every inward and outward act is to be regarded as wicked; (3) We have earlier proved that infants do not sin; (4) Christ reported that "they ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage" (Luke 17:27), despite possible abuses (e.g., gluttony, alcohol, polygamy) none of which actions are intrinsically wrong (Heb. 13:4). Many today do not even bother to get married! Though Genesis 6:2 forever demonstrates the serious danger (1 Kin. 11:1-11; Mat. 12:25) of "mixed marriages," even those unions between the sons of God and the daughters of men are not automatically sinful in and of themselves (1 Cor. 7:12-38).

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Wherefore Let Him That Thinketh He Standeth Take Heed Lest He Fall

Brethren, is it possible for us to have subtly absorbed "humanistic explanations of wrongdoing" or to have improperly reacted to "Calvinism" that we have sometimes failed to "look in the mirror" to recognize and admit the depravity of which we as humans are capable. Tell me, do you read the tragic pronouncement of Genesis 6:5 and see only **others**—either irreligious or religious? "Human beings have a limitless capacity to raise the question of the problem of evil as we see it outside of ourselves, but a disproportionate willingness to raise the question of

evil in us.”¹⁴ I know you respond in revulsion to a Susan Smith heartlessly drowning her two young children in order to perpetuate an ill-fated love affair, but have you honestly faced the grossness of your own rebellion to God? Do you see the “unnatural affection” of a Paul Bernardo who captured two Ontario teenage girls and then tortured, raped, and mutilated them while the *sister of one of the victims* watched and videotaped it for their later viewing pleasure, but somewhat excuse yourself or some relative about “aborting a ‘fetus’”? For whom did you vote in the last election? Have you really stared into the heart of darkness and seen **self** (Rom. 7:14-24)? If not, though once saved, you may be at this moment on the “downhill slide” into perdition!

“Roundabout Calvinists”

Neither can we excuse sin from our *finiteness* nor ignore the fact of precisely where the true responsibility lies! While allegedly opposing Calvinistic misuses of Scripture, some of us pervert such verses as “for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) into meaning “For all **have to** sin and come short of the glory of God” (cf., 1 John 1:8-10)! Some of us often say, “Nobody’s perfect!” or “After all, I’m only human.” A typical example would be the deacon who told me that “boys will be boys” by which he meant it was only *natural* for his sons to dabble in drugs and sex! (He seemed to view his daughters a bit differently!) Sure, I know that boys **do so**, but as we point out to humanists, “You cannot (rightfully) get an **ought** from an **is**.” Even if found set forth in the Bible, descriptions of what “**is**” are not automatically prescriptive,¹⁵ nor do they imply that since the persons described are said to be sinners that the sin committed occurs because of an inherited finitude! Over the years I have had a running battle with some Christians who think it some strange thing when I strongly contend with them over their statement that: “No one can live without sinning.”¹⁶ Is it true that we cannot **not** be a sinner?

Jesus: A Real Son of Man or Not?

Did God really “program us” so that we **must** sin? Please read 1 Corinthians 10:13 to me and name what sin(s) you absolutely **had** to commit! Such a position is “closet Calvinism” from which closet you better be *outed* by the Word of God before Christ renders vengeance on you for implying either that He was not truly human (John 1:14) or that

He sinned (1 John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). We know that Jesus had all the sinless "fleshy infirmities" of human nature which we possess (John 4:6; Mat. 4:2; John 19:28; Mat. 8:24; Heb. 2:18; Mark 13:32; John 8:40), and yet men seeking to find fault in Him could not answer when He asked: "Which of you [rightfully] convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46). In a descriptive mode, Solomon did say: "For there is no man that sinneth not...Surely there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (1 Kin. 8:46; Ecc. 7:20) and further asked: "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Pro. 20:9). However Jesus had not yet arrived upon this earth! Jesus was no robot! It seems some have fallen prey to either humanistic or Calvinist psychology and have forgotten that "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked" (1 John 2:6; cf., 1 Pet. 2:21-24). God does not allow man to be excused for his sinfulness simply because "he also is flesh" (Gen. 6:3), nor will He do so today for (as we point out to NIV promoters in their translation of Romans 7:5, 18, 25, etc.) Christ also was made "flesh" (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 4:2; Heb. 5:7).

Personal Sin

Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* interviewed Yehiel Dinur, a Jewish survivor of the Nazis death camps, regarding Adolf Eichmann. Wallace showed Dinur a film clip from the Nuremberg Trials when Dinur came forward to testify against Eichmann. The clip showed Dinur walking into the courtroom, past the box where Eichmann was seated, then turning and looking at him. As he stared at the prisoner, the Jewish man suddenly began to sob uncontrollably, and then a moment later, he fell to the floor in a dead faint. What had happened? Was Dinur overcome by his hatred? Fear? Terrible memories? No, it was none of these, he said. He told the CBS interviewer that when he looked into the eyes of that terrible murderer, all at once he understood that Eichmann was not a godlike SS officer who had sent so many millions to their deaths. He saw that Adolf Eichmann was an ordinary man. "I was afraid about myself," he explained. "I saw that I am capable to do this. I am...exactly like him." Wallace's summation of Dinur's terrible discovery was that "Eichmann is in all of us."¹⁷

It is not true that "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," but it is true that if you obstinately refuse to study and understand your own human heart as set out in Scripture, then you are in reality living with an irrationality that can ultimately breed the monstrosities that we have witnessed in our time! There is a sense in which we truly must "see ourselves" in reading

about the abominable sins committed by others, including those recorded in the Bible, for that is their very purpose.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters...Neither let us commit fornication...Neither let us make trial of the Lord...Neither murmur ye...Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor. 10:6-12).

It is possible “to quote by rote” such passages as this and still not see that the Bible is a mirror of the very real possibilities in regard to one’s self. Like Lot, unless we have passed the point of no return (Heb. 6:4-6), most of us are full of shock and vexed in our righteous souls from day to day with the lawless deeds of others

but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, and despise dominion. Daring, self-willed, they tremble not to rail at dignities...But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed (2 Pet. 2:10-12).

These are the incorrigible ones you see on the nightly news who are so depraved that they do not even try to hide their faces from the lights and television cameras. We must come to recognize that, though the Bible purposefully and repeatedly portrays the fact that every person is created by an all-seeing God after His *likeness* as a matter of cosmological principle (Gen. 1:26-27), man is left to his own unfathomable freedom which (except in the case of Christ—Heb 4:5) is never a matter of 100% righteousness in accomplished ethical fact. Biblical narratives are designed to objectively reflect the *mystery* between God’s will and providential guidance, as well as man’s freedom and fall into sin (2 Tim. 3:16-17), but until you admit your very own personal sin and its meaning for you, you are also headed for the Hell that awaits self-willed, blatant scoffers of God.

Me First, Then Others

While we readily recognize the sins of others (Rom. 2:17-24) and **their** awful condition, until and unless we can admit **our** personal sin as did Paul (Rom. 7:24) we, too, are doomed to Hell! Do you ever say: “There but for the grace of God go I!...Lord, be merciful to me a sinner...bring me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil by your

divine providence”? I once read where Englishman editor Malcolm Muggeridge said that he had never been unfaithful to his wife but that he always carried a fantasy that, if the right circumstances were to present themselves, he could imagine infidelity with another woman. One morning while on assignment in India and miles away from wife and family, he went swimming in the Ganges River. Quite a distance away, he saw a woman bathing and he told himself: “This is my moment. I am a wealthy Englishman. She is a poor Indian. What could it hurt? Who would ever know?” As he began to swim upstream toward her, the current of water was strong, as was the current of his conscience. Yet, onward he swam. When he got within a few yards of her, he stopped. She was a leper. Her nose was eaten away and sores, and blotches were all over her skin, with the ends of her fingers gone. Muggeridge said he immediately thought: “What a wretched woman she is!” but then, in a moment like Paul’s, he thought: “What a wretched man *I am!*” Friend, if you do not understand this point, then pardon me for slowly backing away from you and running to my car!

I fear we fail to understand and impress upon ourselves and others that Scripture is addressing us personally when it says:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it? I, Jehovah, search the mind, I try the heart, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings (Jer. 17:9-10).

Our Lord agreed fully with Genesis 6:5 as to where evil originates (Mat. 23:27; 5:28; 15:18-20; Mark 7:15). Yes, I know Calvinism’s view on babies is wrong and that the “imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21), but will **you** admit this verse speaks about when you were a youth? Because God does not immediately punish those evildoers I see about me, should I see it only in **them** as “the sons of men” whose heart thereby “is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc. 8:11), and not myself? When confronted by self-righteous Pharisees and scribes accosting Him for eating with “publicans and sinners,” the Lord said: “I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Brethren, any of us from time to time can fall back into violation of Paul’s words:

For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace: because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be: and they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:6-8).

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Why Sin Happens

We are the ones who control our mindset and refuse to subject it to the authority of Deity. Neither Romans 8:6-8 nor the Calvinist perversion of 1 Corinthians 2:14 teach that man can rightfully say: “I could not help it—to resist I needed a Direct Operation of the Spirit!”¹⁸ By God’s Spirit in John’s Words we are explicitly told wherein the fault lies:

And this is the judgment, that the light [Jesus] is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God (John 3:19-21).

Young person, if you have not obeyed the gospel yet, here is the *real* why! You may try to *play dumb*, but God sees into your heart even as he saw into those of millions in Noah’s day! He repents that He made you and is grieved in His heart about your damnation, too. You cannot fool Christ who right now sees your heart (John 2:25). While there are legitimate mental diseases that may affect some people’s behavior in ways they cannot help, determinism only masquerades as being “humane and kind,” while in reality it actually opens the door to hideous cruelty because it denies the ability of people to change their behavior. Ultimately such is by implication to lay blame on Jehovah Himself.

It Broke His Heart Because You Are Not A Hairless Ape!

As we have previously mentioned, hyperbole implies deep emotion. Our God is not the God of the deist who is nothing more than a cosmic power as in “may the Force be with you” of *Star Wars*’ fame. Genesis 6:5 is so horribly sad because God is a personal Being with actual emotional feelings (e.g., anger, love, happiness, sorrow) which respond to the thoughts and actions¹⁹ of human beings; so “it grieved him at his heart” (Gen. 6:6b) to see the extent of depravity in what should have been His *star* exhibit (Job 1:1; 2:3). Whereas the determinism of both humanism or Calvinism denies the proper respect which man is due as a result of being the only *animal* made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jam. 3:9), including being a spirit (1 The. 5:23; Mat. 10:28; John 4:24) and possessing moral *oughtness* or the capacity of

realizing real right and wrong (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 2:14-15), the Bible teaches that men are persons similar to God Himself with the power to think abstractly, feel, and make ethical decisions. He “hath set eternity in their heart” (Ecc. 3:11), thus building men with “a deep-seated, compulsive desire to know the character, composition, beauty, meaning, purpose, and destiny of all created things.”²⁰ There is a basis for the *ache* we feel in our hearts for something more enduring than this life, and for the *ache* He feels in His great heart over us.

Man is no mere hairless ape, but rather it is certain that:

humanity’s position in creation was intended by God to be unparalleled...Man is a creature superior to all other creatures in this world—and therefore having the rule over them—by virtue of his ability to know and love his Creator. This ability to know (mind) and love (will) is the *imago Dei* because in so knowing and loving God, man knows and does in finite measure what God does in infinite measure...Once I understand the nature of myself as God’s special work of art I must also conclude that whatever value I have as a person is derived from God’s purpose for the creation. I reflect His glory and His will.²¹

While it is good to have a healthy awe and respect for our Creator, we still should ask: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but little lower than God, And crownest him with glory and honor” (Psa. 8:4-5). Man has the same spiritual, God-like attributes and qualities of Adam’s original state, until the time in his youth (Eze. 28:15; Isa. 7:16; Rom. 7:9) when he freely fails to choose God’s way (hence choosing his own way), making such action truly meaningful. His special revelation in Scripture tells us many things about Himself which demonstrate that we have much in common with Him, in order to draw us near to Him and into the warm, close relationship He desires (Gen. 3:8; Phi. 3:10; John 17:3; Jer. 9:23-24).

How the Lord Feels

While we often think only of sin incurring the *wrath* of God, the Bible teaches us that it breaks God’s heart the way a rebellious child crushes the heart of any loving parent. When we break God’s law, we grieve His loving heart. When your unmarried teenage daughter comes to you and says “I’m pregnant,” or when you get a phone call from the police saying, “We’ve just arrested your son for drugs,” you are not just angry, you are

grieved, your heart aches, your stomach is queasy or nauseous. God loves us greater than any human parent ever had for a child (Mat. 7:9-11)! No wonder Paul wrote: “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30; cf., Psa. 78:40; Isa. 63:10).

Sometimes children can be so bad that we, too, wish they had never been born (cf., Gen. 6:6). In the worst cases a parent may even recognize the need to destroy the child for the sake of justice and the public welfare. There are few situations more grievous than this one to a parent’s heart as demonstrated in David and Absalom (2 Sam. 18:5, 33; 19:1-7). This is the way we have made God Almighty feel about us! We often blame God for *our* grief, but how often do we think about the sorrow we have caused Him? Men add insult to the injury they have done to the Father when they excuse their sin by saying they are not hurting anyone, as if there is ever a *victimless crime*, for Genesis 6:6 proclaims Him a victim!

In spite of the fact that He knew that He could and would restore Lazarus from death to life, Jesus wept not only because of His friend’s sorrow, but groaned or moved with indignation deep within His spirit in the face of the effect that sin and death caused in the world (John 11:33-38). Yet deity so values mankind’s freedom of thought and action that He prefers eight obedient souls be saved than to “lobotomize” man by His removing choice from our attributes (1 Pet. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). Jesus grieved over man’s stubborn refusal to trust in Him and accept His offer of aid (Mat. 23:37-38), just as when our children refuse to listen to us or accept our help, it hurts us deeply. The price that He paid for our sins made Him exceedingly sorrowful to a level of grief that is beyond our comprehension (Mat. 26:38; Luke 22:44).

CONCLUSION

Do you now acknowledge that Jesus was no unfeeling robot and that it caused him great pain and sorrow to die for you (Isa. 53:3; Heb. 4:15-16)? Noah and his household could have equally turned and gone the other way with the countless, hardened millions, but though a sinner himself, he chose to respond to the wooing and pleading of God and “found favor in the eyes of Jehovah” (Gen. 6:8). By so doing “Noah was a righteous man, *and* perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9) which included in type, the blood of the Savior (Gen. 8:20-21). As our age deteriorates as other ages have done before us, and our civilization is perhaps nearing the point of utter collapse, we can be so

thankful that "God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3:26) through the gospel. Just as our sins bring great sorrow to God, our salvation brings Him much joy (Luke 15:32). So, when we read that there will be no tears in heaven (Rev. 21:4), perhaps this is as much a statement about God's lack of tears as it is for ourselves! Will you not repent of your wickedness of thought and action and come to the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" today?

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

²James R Davis, "The Earth Is Filled With Violence." Website, <http://www.focusongod.com/earth>.

³Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil: Restoring The Soul In A Disintegrating Culture* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1996), p. 6. Despite touches of Calvinism, this is an excellent volume overall!

⁴I urge you to purchase Russell Kirk's *The Roots Of The American Order* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 3rd ed., 1991).

⁵See <http://www.uua.org/news/siecus/declaration0100>. For a list of organizations upholding the declaration, both secular and religious, see <ft://www.siecus.org.pglicv/NCSSE/ncsscOO02>. Lest you think it will not affect your family, note that the list includes the National Education Association Health Information Network and numerous other groups which will do so! Of course, the signers of the declaration do say that sexuality is "God-given" and that they are committed to "lifelong, age-appropriate sexuality education in schools...!"

⁶See http://www.worldnetdaily.com/bluesky_exnews/20000122_xex_theologians_shtml. Could pre-diluvian Lamech himself have written out a better statement concerning the age-old rebellion of the human race against his Creator than the Unitarian Universalist Church's statement which maintains that "personal experience, conscience, and reason should be the final authorities in religion. In the end, religious authority lies not in a book, person, or institution, but in ourselves." Pure subjectivism is followed by pure moral chaos!

⁷Russell Kirk, *The Roots Of The American Order* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 3rd ed., 1991), p. 15.

⁸See Thomas B. Warren's debates with such men as Antony G. N. Flew, Wallace I. Matson, and Jerome Barnhart.

⁹Zacharias, pp. 174-175.

¹⁰Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil In Soul And Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 24.

¹¹David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points Of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian And Reformed Publishing, 1976), p. 251; C. A. Feenstra, *Calvinism In The Light Of God's Word* (Sioux Center, IA: Privately Printed, 1968), pp. 68-69. The latter volume has been reprinted and was

written by a former Calvinist—one of the best refutations in print of the five points. Cf., David P. Brown, *Calvinism* (Spring, TX: Bible Resource Publications, 1998).

¹²Morris, p. 176.

¹³For details see standard Hermeneutic texts, including W. Dan Carter, “The Hyperbole In Bible Interpretation,” *Rightly Dividing The Word. Vol. II—Special Hermeneutics*, ed. Terry M. Hightower (Pensacola, FL: Firm Foundation, 1991), pp. 164-176.

¹⁴Zacharias, p. 148.

¹⁵For an example of how skeptics allege contradictions from such, see William Henry Burr, *Self Contradictions Of The Bible in Classics Of Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann (New York, NY: A. J. Davis, 1987, reprint of original 1860), p. 82.

¹⁶No, I am not affirming the false teaching of the Church Of God of perfectionism or total sanctification; such is a gross misuse of 1 John 3:6, 9 in light of 1 John 1:7-9; 2:1-2; Gen. 44:22. The Baptist Charles B. Williams got it right in his *The New Testament In The Language Of The People*: “No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning” and in a footnote explains that the Greek is the present of habitual action. This also answers, of course, the skeptical claim that the Bible teaches “Christians are sinless” while at the same time affirming that “Christians sin.”

¹⁷D. James Kennedy, *Character & Destiny: A Nation In Search Of Its Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 219. Why did “regular people” fall in so easily with Hitler’s atrocities? Because they chose to sin (Jam. 1:14-15).

¹⁸Amazingly, Mac Deaver now teaches that the child of God needs and receives such direct help, but alleges that the non-Christian (who obviously needs it too, and normally more!) receives none. It remains to be seen if our brother will embrace Calvinism’s damnation (i.e., negative attribution) in Adam of the entire race since he has embraced the idea that God can directly have certain required (positive) traits for you while you still get the credit for doing it yourself. See Terry M. Hightower, *The New Deaver Holy Ghost Moral Infusion Machine* (Farwell, TX: Privately Printed, 1998) and Curtis A. Cates, “Does Deity Strengthen The Christian In Some ‘Supra-literary,’ Direct Way?” *Studies In 1, 2 Peter And Jude*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1998), pp. 519-600, also printed separately by Valid Publications under the title *Does The Holy Spirit Operate Directly Upon The Heart Of The Saint?*

¹⁹Terry M. Hightower, “Does God Really Hear And Answer Prayer?” *Studies In 1, 2 Peter And Jude*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1998), pp. 648-666.

²⁰Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Integrating Wisdom Theology Into Old Testament Theology,” *A Tribute To Gleason Archer*, eds. Kaiser and R. F. Youngblood (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986), p. 205.

²¹W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense Of Your World From A Biblical Standpoint* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), pp. 106-107.

CANNOT ENTER THE LAND DEUTERONOMY 34:4

John Priola



John Priola was born in Indianapolis, Indiana. He was fortunate enough to grow up under the preaching of W. L. Totty. John is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching (1975) and the University of West Florida (1986). He has done local work in Indiana, Florida, and Alabama. For the past twelve years he has been employed with BellSouth and working with smaller congregations in the Birmingham area.

John is married to the former Donna Fassino of Indianapolis, Indiana, and they have two children: Rachel and Andy.

The book of Deuteronomy opens with the children of Israel encamped in the plains of Moab, east of Jordan (Deu. 1:5). Nearly five hundred years have passed from the time of God's promise to Abram (Gen. 12:1-5). It is now in the eleventh month of the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt (Deu. 1:3). Thirty-eight years earlier Moses, in obedience to God's command, had chosen twelve men and sent them forth from Kadesh to "search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel" (Num. 13:2).¹ The twelve "returned from searching of the land after forty days" (Num. 13:25). They were in unanimous agreement about what the land was like. "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this *is* the fruit of it" (Num. 13:27). However, there was disagreement between the twelve on whether they would be successful if they went up and tried to take the land. Ten of the spies brought back an evil report (Num. 13:31-33). As a result of their evil report:

All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were

it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt (Num. 14:2-4).

Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who did not agree with the evil report, rent their clothes:

And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, *is* an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not (Num. 14:6-9).

The congregation wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb. It provoked God, and He told Moses:

Say unto them, As *truly* as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, *concerning* which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised (Num. 14:28-31).

They shall wander in the wilderness forty years, until their carcasses be wasted (Num. 14:33). As we enter the book of Deuteronomy, those years of wandering are past. We are now in the fortieth year, and all the men of war (over 600,000) have been “wasted out from among the host” and are “consumed and dead from among the people” (Deu. 2:14-16).

Much has happened in this fortieth year. In the first month, Miriam died at Kadesh (Num. 20:1). On the first day of the fifth month, “Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the LORD, and died there” (Num. 33:38). As Deuteronomy opens the promised land is before Israel. Before long, they will cross over Jordan to inherit the land, which flows with milk and honey. In a few weeks the children of Israel will enter the land of promise, the land of Canaan.

Moses, all the way through Deuteronomy, repeatedly makes mention of Canaan and their entrance into it. We come to the close of the book, to the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, and Moses is shown the land of Canaan, the promised land, in its entirety from north to south and east to west. There the Lord told Moses: “This *is* the land which I swear

unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see *it* with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither” (Deu. 34:4). Our discussion at this time is: “Thou shalt not go over thither” or “Ye cannot enter the land.”

Moses had Israel at the threshold of their glorious expectation. **But!!!** The prophet was told, “Thou shalt not go over thither.” What a sad moment this must have been for the grand old prophet, now one hundred twenty years old. The Word of God says:

There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel (Deu. 34:10-12).

But he would not cross over Jordan and enter into Canaan!! How Moses longed for Canaan. Earlier, he had pled with God to “let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon” (Deu. 3:25). But the pleading was to no avail. Moses said:

But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan (Deu. 3:23-27).

Moses was not the only one prohibited from entering Canaan. He would join those mentioned earlier, over 600,000, along with Aaron, who would die short of inheriting Canaan.

The Hebrews writer described Moses as “*faithful* in all his house” (Heb. 3:2-5). Jesus would be raised up like unto Moses (Acts 3:22). “The law was given by Moses” (John 1:17). This Moses is the one that the Hebrews writer said:

When he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

Yet, this grand old prophet would not enter the promised land. Why? How could this be?

Why is it that one so diligent as Moses was allowed to see the land, but not allowed to enter? Had he not led Israel triumphantly to the door of the inheritance? What did he do that was of such a magnitude that God would say, “Thou shalt not go over thither?” Numbers 20 is the background as to why Moses was not permitted to enter Canaan. Let us note the first twelve verses of that chapter.

THE COMPLAINT OF THE PEOPLE

The children of Israel had come to Kadesh.

There was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode [contended, NKJV] with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink (Num. 20:2-5).

This is by no means the first time that Moses has encountered this kind of reaction from the children of Israel. They murmured on many other occasions. Read Psalm 106 and see the references of the Psalmist to their murmuring. In fact, one of the references in Psalm 106 is to the events under consideration in our text. The Psalmist says, “They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips” (Psa. 106:32-33—NKJV).

THE COMMAND OF GOD

“And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them” (Num. 20:6). The Lord instructs Moses and Aaron as to what He wants them to do:

The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink (Num. 20:7-8).

THE CONDUCT OF MOSES

And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the

rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts *also* (Num. 20:9-11).

THE CONDEMNATION OF GOD

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them (Num. 20:12).

There are at least three other places which indicate God's attitude toward what Moses did at Kadesh. Later on in the same chapter, the Lord says, "**because ye rebelled against my word**" (Num. 20:24). In Numbers 27:14 it is "**For ye rebelled against my commandment.**" Then in Deuteronomy 32:51 the Lord said, "**Because ye trespassed against me.**" Vine's says that *trespass* generally expresses man's unfaithfulness. That unfaithfulness can be to God, man's fellow-man, or unfaithfulness in marriage. It is translated *transgress* in some passages. Therefore, God did not look upon Moses' actions lightly. It is serious when God classifies an action as (1) trespassing against Him, (2) unbelief, (3) rebelling against His Word, and (4) rebelling against His commandment. It kept Moses from entering Canaan.

Romans 15:4 states: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Certainly this Old Testament episode contains many valuable lessons for those of us who live under the New Testament. What are some principles we can learn from this tragic event? As Moses was not allowed to enter the land, you and I need to be aware that it can happen to us also. May God help us to learn from his mistakes so we do not repeat them in our own lives.

Let us consider some things that were not the cause of Moses being told "thou shalt not go over thither." First, Moses did not forfeit his entrance into Canaan because he went to the wrong **source** for instruction. The Lord does not say the transgression was because he went to the wrong source. In fact, Moses is to be commended for going to the **right source** for instruction. The people complained and what did Moses and Aaron do? They "went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces:

and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them” (Num. 20:6). They went to the Lord to find out His Word regarding the matter.

That is exactly where each of us needs to go to learn what we must do to be saved. We need to go to God’s Word to learn what we must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, on one occasion when “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66), asked the twelve, “Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:67-68). “The way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Not every way is the right way. A way may seem right when it is not. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). If we are to enter the land, we must go to the right source. **The Bible is the right source.** It is God’s Word. The Psalmist said, “Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). The Bible believed and obeyed will produce a Christian. The answer to our needs is not found in a Prayer Book, a Discipline, a Catechism, or a Confession of Faith. Those are the products of men. None of those is the right source. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psa. 119:130). The entrance of God’s Word will give understanding to the simple. It will give understanding regarding self, sin, the Savior, and salvation. It is to God’s Word that each of us **must** turn to learn how to become a Christian on the way to heaven. If an individual is to “enter into the land,” he or she must go to the right source.

The reason that Moses was told, “Thou shalt not go over thither” was not because God’s instruction was not **sufficient**. The command of God to Moses was enough to meet the needs of the situation and achieve the proposed end. He was certainly given enough information to know what to do. Everything that Moses needed was given in the command. Not one thing that was needful was lacking in any way. His disobedience was not because the command of God was insufficient. The same can be said for us today. If we miss Canaan, it will not be because God did not provide us with sufficient instruction. God’s Word meets our every need. It is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Word of God is all-sufficient. We have no need for subjective experiences or additional revelations. He

“hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). His Word is “able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Also, it was not because God’s command was too difficult to understand that Moses was not allowed to go over thither. The command of God to Moses and Aaron was **simple** (Num. 20:8). Moses was not permitted to enter Canaan, but it was not because the command that God gave him at Kadesh was too difficult to understand. According to my count, the command consisted of only twenty-three words as it is translated in the King James Version. Most of the twenty-three words are one-syllable words. The command is very plain. None of the words is difficult to understand at all. It is a very direct command. What is difficult to understand about (1) taking the rod, (2) gathering the assembly together, (3) making sure Aaron is involved, and (4) speaking unto the rock before their eyes? Is that not simple? That is exactly how it is with God’s instructions to us. Paul said, “be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*” (Eph. 5:17). The implications of Paul’s instruction in this verse are: (1) the Lord has a will, (2) He has made His will known, and (3) we can understand it. Notice how simple and direct John 8:24 is. Jesus says, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins.” Is not the Lord’s command regarding the necessity of repentance easy to be understood? “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). What is difficult about the Lord’s instruction regarding confession? Is it not very plain, direct, and simple?

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Mat. 10:32-33).

Likewise, is not Acts 2:38, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” very clear about the relationship that exists between repentance, baptism, and the forgiveness of sins? Who could ever read, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33) and have difficulty understanding the **priority** that God expects us to attach to things spiritual? How could one read “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24) and not understand the **intensity** and

effort that God expects us to put forth in living the Christian life? If we are not able to enter spiritual Canaan, it will not be because God's commands were too difficult to understand. Like the command He gave to Moses at Kadesh, God's commands to us are simple and can be understood.

Another lesson we can learn is that **complete obedience** is necessary to enter the promised land. Partial obedience is not acceptable. God's command to Moses at Kadesh, consisted of four parts: (1) taking the rod, (2) gathering the assembly together, (3) making sure Aaron is involved, and (4) speaking unto the rock before their eyes. Moses observed three of the four. He had the rod, he gathered the congregation, and Aaron was involved. In reference to the rod, the text says, "Moses took the rod from before the LORD, **as he commanded him**" (Num. 20:9). Many, many other places in Numbers reference the obedience of Moses by ascribing to him that he did "as the LORD commanded him," "as the LORD commanded Moses," or "according to the commandment of the LORD" (Num. 1:19; 2:33; 3:42; 3:51; 4:37; 17:11; 20:27; 27:22; 31:31, 41, 47). Had Moses spoken to the rock instead of smiting it, it would have been said he "did as the LORD commanded him." When the tabernacle was being built, one cannot help but notice the repetition of the phrase that it was done "as the LORD commanded Moses" or "according to the commandment of the LORD." Exodus 39:32 says, "Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished: and the children of Israel did according to **all** that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they." At Kadesh, it cannot be said that Moses did **all** the Lord commanded. Some of what he did at Kadesh was according to the commandment of the Lord but not **all**. The end result was that partial obedience is disobedience. Moses did not do **all** that God commanded him. That kept him from entering Canaan.

Furthermore, this example also teaches us that changing God's command is not obedience either. Changing any part of God's commands will keep one from being able to "go over thither." Moses changed one of God's instructions. He substituted smiting for speaking. God told him to **speak** to the rock; Moses **smote** it instead. It is important to note that God had on another occasion (at Horeb) commanded Moses to **smite** a rock to get water (Exo. 17:6). But he was not instructed to **smite** the rock at Kadesh. He was commanded to **speak** to the rock at Kadesh. When

God commands one to **speak** and one **smites** instead, he has changed what God commanded and rebelled against the commandment of the Lord. **Smite** does not mean **speak**, and **speak** does not mean **smite**. Moses was authorized only to speak to the rock at this time, even though God had authorized him to smite the rock to produce the same thing earlier. He could only believe God and obey God by doing what God said without alteration. God could change His own method of producing water, but Moses had no right to tamper with God's directions. His change of God's explicit instruction kept Moses out of Canaan.

What do you think Moses would say if you could speak face to face with him and ask this question: "Moses, what would you do in this matter if you could roll back time?" This author is certain that Moses would respond by saying something like this: "I would obey God as exactly as I had in other things and not substitute any of my way for God's will. I would not change God's command in any way, but would be certain that I did everything He said, exactly like He said." This scribe knows that is what Moses would say. The book of Deuteronomy is the record of the last weeks of Moses' life. It records for us some of his *sermons* to the children of Israel. These are the sermons of a man who knows he shall not enter Canaan. He knows he has but a short time to live. These are the words of a man whose thoughts center on things eternal and not things temporal. Guess what permeates his every word? It is complete, total obedience to God by doing **all** that God has said. In doing a Bible search of Deuteronomy for "observe all," "keep all," and "do all," over fourteen pages of verses were printed out!!! It is not difficult to see where his emphasis was as he exhorted them to faithfulness. Here is a list of some of those passages: Deu. 5:29; 6:2; 6:25; 8:1; 11:8; 11:22; 11:32; 12:28; 13:18; 15:5; 26:18; 27:1; 8:15. Not only that, there are repeated warnings about adding to or diminishing aught from (Deu. 4:2; 12:32) and not turning aside to the right hand or to the left (Deu. 5:32; 17:20; 28:14). In other words: do not change a thing! At the conclusion of one of Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy, he said:

Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it *is* not a vain thing for you; because it is *your* life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deu. 32:46-47).

Moses did not think that commandment-keeping was a “vain thing”; he did think, “it is your life.”

What a lesson that is for us. There are some things required of us to enter heaven. If we fail to do these, as Moses failed to speak to the rock, “we shall not enter” the heavenly portals. We cannot change a word of it. In no way can we add to or diminish aught from. We shall not go over thither if we turn aside to the right hand or the left. We **must** believe (Mark 16:16), or we will die in our sins (John 8:24). We **must** repent (2 Pet. 3:9), or we will perish (Luke 13:3). We **must** confess (Rom. 10:9-10), or Jesus will deny us before the Father (Mat. 10:32-33). We **must** be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), or we cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Who can say, “baptism does **not** save us,” when 1 Peter 3:21 says that “baptism doth also **now** save us” and not be guilty of turning aside to the right hand or the left? Has one not turned aside to the right hand or the left when he teaches: “Get saved and join the church of your choice?” God’s Word teaches that the same process one goes through to be saved is the very same process that one goes through to be added to the church. God’s Word teaches that one is added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47)—not by joining. God’s Word teaches that there is one church (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4), not many from which to choose. We, therefore, see that we will enter heaven if we obey the gospel plan of salvation; we will not enter His rest if we fail to do these things. As change kept Moses out of Canaan, so change on our part in these matters will keep us out of heaven.

One must also worship God properly to be saved. It is important that we worship “according to the commandments of the Lord.” Worship must be in spirit and truth (John 4:24). It must involve the right attitude and the right acts. New Testament worship includes: (1) praying (1 Cor. 14:14-16; Acts 2:42), (2) preaching of God’s Word (Acts 20:7; 2 Tim. 4:2), (3) giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7), (4) partaking of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7), and (5) singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Not all worship is acceptable worship. It is possible to worship God, but do so in vain (Mat. 15:7-9). We have no more right to add, subtract, or change God’s will regarding worship than did Moses to change God’s will regarding speaking to the rock. To do so, will result in our not entering heavenly Canaan (Lev. 10:1-2). Let us, therefore, be careful not to tamper with the will of God regarding worship.

What a lesson this is for those among us who do not believe commandment-keeping is significant. How we must be very careful to make sure that we are obeying the commands of God so that we can enter Canaan. Numbers 20:1-12 offers no comfort to those who try to minimize commandment-keeping. Some seem to think that commandment-keeping can be excused by love. But the Lord said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Do we want to be a friend of God? Here is the Lord’s answer as to how it is done: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). John, the apostle of love, did not minimize commandment-keeping (1 John 2:3-4; 5:2-3). Solomon, after speaking of the futility of (1) human wisdom, (2) pleasure and wealth, and (3) materialism in the book of Ecclesiastes, came to the conclusion that the wise man will live his life in obedience to God. Note his words:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Our very entrance into heaven is dependent upon commandment-keeping. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). How is it possible to do the will of God without keeping the commandments of God? We must be careful to do **all** that God commands us, not adding to, subtracting from, nor changing what God has said. The Bible closes with the solemn warning against adding to or subtracting from God’s Word (Rev. 22:18-19). In that same chapter, instruction is given to those who want to enter in through the gates into the city. Here is how it is done: “Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). Moses learned that God expects total and complete obedience to His Word. It is a truth each of us needs to heed.

From the trespass of Moses we can learn **silence prohibits instead of permits**. God was silent about smiting the rock at Kadesh. He said nothing at all about smiting. Moses did what God said nothing about (that is silence), but Moses trespassed in what he did. Therefore, when we do what God has said nothing about, we trespass and sin. We rebel against God and His Word. The reason for such is that silence does not permit.

What is permitted is what God has authorized. If God has not authorized it, then it is not permitted. If God has not authorized it, then it is a trespass against God to do it. Some would say that whatever is not expressly forbidden is authorized. What did God say about smiting the rock at Kadesh? Not one word. He was silent about it. If He was silent about it, then He had not expressly forbidden it. If He had not expressly forbidden it, then according to the “if it is not expressly forbidden then, it is authorized” proponents, it was authorized. Moses did what God was silent about. Was it acceptable to God? For doing what God was silent about, Moses was told: “Thou shalt not go over thither.” For those who like to argue the acceptability of something on the basis, “The Bible does not say, ‘Do not do it,’” Moses would say, “God did not tell me, ‘Do not smite the rock’, and I smote it instead of speaking to it. When I did, God told me I had rebelled against Him, and it kept me from being able to enter Canaan.” See Hebrews 7:11-14 for additional teaching on respecting the silence of Scripture. Silence does not authorize; it prohibits.

As stated earlier, Moses was not the only one who missed Canaan. All the men of war of the earlier generation, more than six hundred thousand, failed to enter also. The Hebrews writer, in Hebrews 3, makes mention of those who did not enter: “We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19). He mentioned them to be able to make application to **us**. In so doing, he warns and encourages **us**. Observe Hebrews 4:7-8, “To day if **ye** will hear his voice, harden not **your** hearts.” Notice further from Hebrews 3:12, “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of **you** an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Notice also, Hebrews 3:13-15,

But exhort **one another** daily, while it is called To day; lest any of **you** be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For **we** are made partakers of Christ, if **we** hold the beginning of **our** confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if **ye** will hear his voice, harden not **your** hearts, as in the provocation.

Hebrews 4:1 continues: “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left **us** of entering into his rest, any of **you** should seem to come short of it.” We are exhorted: “Let **us** labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest **any man** fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11). Hebrews 12:15 says, “Looking diligently lest **any man** fall of [margin, fall from] the grace of God.” Many other passages clearly tell us that we will not be saved and enter heaven if we disobey God and fail to repent. Among

those are Matthew 7:21-23; 25:1-13, 31-46, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Galatians 5:19-21, Revelation 21:27, 22:14. We should, therefore, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10).

Moses made a tragic mistake, and the consequences of it were huge. However, Moses obviously repented of the wrong which he did. In Matthew 17 we find him at the mount of transfiguration. The Hebrews writer, writing by inspiration, included him among “Faith’s Hall of Fame.” That, too, is a lesson for us. When we fall, when we stumble, when we sin, when we transgress God’s law, God does not look favorably upon it. However, God has made it possible that we can come back, if we so choose. If we seek forgiveness in harmony with God’s Word, we can be reconciled to God. Moses did. Moses, no doubt, is among the redeemed. Will that be able to be said of us when our earthly pilgrimage is over?

We shall all soon pass over the chilly waters of Jordan. God loves us (John 3:16), and He does not want any to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). He is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). However, He will destroy in hell all who disobey His will (2 The. 1:7-9). God forbid that any one of us should hear the Judge say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). “Thou shalt not go over thither.” May God find every one of us doing His blessed will faithfully; so we shall reach the land of corn and wine, there to dwell eternally with the one who loved us so.

What a day that will be
 When my Jesus I shall see
 And I look upon his face
 The one who saved me by his grace
 When he takes my by the hand
 And leads me through the promised land
 What a day, glorious day that will be.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

ANOTHER GENERATION WHICH KNEW NOT JEHOVAH JUDGES 2:10

Eddie Whitten



Eddie Whitten worked in industry for thirty years before going into full-time preaching. He attended Brown Trail School of Preaching (1967-1969). He preached in San Antonio before returning to Brown Trail where he worked as the Administrator and Director of the School of Preaching from 1971-1989. He served as an elder of the Brown Trail church for 15 years.

Eddie was Co-owner, President and Business Manager of the Firm Foundation Publishing Company from 1990-1998. He is the author of a book on the Minor Prophets and has edited several lectureship books. He appears on lectureships and gospel meetings across the country each year and has preached in a number of foreign countries.

Eddie now preaches for the Northeast Church of Christ in Hurst, Texas. He and his late wife are the parents of three daughters, and have nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

It is tragic that there are so many sad verses in the Bible relating to conditions that prompted them. One would think that the content of a book that conveys God's promise of eternal life would be filled with good things, happy things. Well, it is true the Bible does tell us of God's wonderful love and blessings for those who submit to His will. It is also true that the Bible tells of the fruit of rejection, disobedience, and unfaithfulness to His Word.

All of us weep either on our own behalf or on behalf of others who experience rejection from within our own families. A husband who abandons his wife and children brings terrible grief. A son or daughter who rejects the family heritage and embraces an evil lifestyle is a travesty that breaks hearts. All of us are aware of the thousands of children, especially girls, who run away from home and so many times are thrown to the unmerciful lusts of unscrupulous exploiters. All of these things and many other comparable scenarios are sad commentaries of life.

When we read of sad situations, we wonder how, or why, such situations came to be. It is rather simple to look back and recognize what happened to bring about hurtful and disappointing circumstances. Life is like that. For the most part, the mistakes people make are not intentionally unwise. If all of the people of the world made the right choices constantly, it would be a perfect world. Such is never going to be the case. All of us make mistakes in judgment. We make unwise choices that result in disappointment. Sometimes our lack of wisdom results in severe consequences. We must deal with whatever our judgment, or lack thereof, brings upon us. There are two important reactions necessary to avoid suffering the consequences of actions that produce undesirable results: (1) never let failures keep us from trying again, and (2) learn what defeated us and avoid the same thing happening again.

As we consider the sad statement assigned for this lesson, it is with hope that we can determine its cause and take whatever precautions we must to avoid falling into the same circumstance. One of the great lessons we learn from the Old Testament prophets is that **privilege involves responsibility!**

THE STATEMENT

The statement with which we are concerned in this lecture is that found in Judges 2:10.

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel (Jud. 2:7-10).¹

The magnitude of this statement is monumental. The language is not conclusive as to whether *another generation* referred to the children of those who were alive at the time of the death of Joshua or to a subsequent generation. It could have meant the grandchildren of those who were delivered from Egyptian bondage by Moses. It could also mean that the knowledge of God and the appreciation of His great works He did in Egypt had gradually disappeared from the memory of the Israelites.

Whether it has reference to that generation or to a later generation, the result is the same.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STATEMENT

To have a clearer understanding of the import of this regrettable statement, we must go back to the conditions that made it so significant. For two hundred and fifteen years, the children of Israel lived in the land of Goshen located in the nation of Egypt. His jealous brothers had sold Joseph, the son of Jacob, into slavery. He had been wrongfully accused and was cast into prison. In prison, he interpreted, through God's power, the dreams of the Pharaoh's butler and his baker. The interpretations came true (Gen. 40). Later, the king had a dream that his wise men could not interpret. Joseph was remembered for his interpretation of the butler's dream. He was called to interpret the king's dreams, which he did. They foretold of seven years of plenty that were to come to Egypt. They also foretold of seven years of famine that would follow the seven years of plenty. Joseph was placed in charge of providing, during the first seven years, an ample supply of goods to meet the needs of the impending famine. He had risen to great power in Egypt under the Hyksos kings, Bedouin princes who were descendants of shepherds.

It was through the influence of Joseph that his father, Jacob, and his family were invited to come into Egypt to live. In the intervening years, Jacob's family grew into a great nation. God had changed Jacob's name to Israel. The Israelites (descendants of Jacob) became a threat to the new Pharaohs so they were placed in bondage. They cried to God for deliverance and God sent Moses to deliver them out of Egypt. Because of sin, God caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness until all that generation above the age of twenty years died. Joshua had received the mantle of leadership at the death of Moses. He led the children of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land of Canaan. The land had been conquered and divided by tribes. Finally, Joshua grew old and died. It was after the death of Joshua and the elders of that time that the sad and forlorn declaration was made that there arose another generation who knew not God.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE STATEMENT

As is the case with all poor judgments, Israel fell on troubled times. The history of Israel is one of repeated tragedies. For a time, Israel would be faithful to God, at least to a degree and God would bless them. Then

would come departure from God and His grace. Invariably, the enemies of Israel would prevail over them and oppress them. Finally, the time would come when, out of desperation and helplessness, the children of God would cry out to Him for help. God would send a judge to deliver them out of the bondage of their enemies and bring them back into a proper relationship with Him. This is the story of the book of Judges. Over a period of 336 years this pattern occurred.

At last, the time came when “*there was no king in Israel*” (Jud. 18:1; 19:1). *King*, in these passages, must refer to someone that would take the authority of leadership. It is not until we read 1 Samuel 8 that we find the people clamoring for a king. The closing verse of the book of Judges records a chaotic condition: “In those days *there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes*” (Jud. 21:25). Apostasy always bears within itself the seeds of destruction. Without leadership, Israel fell into internal wars. The tribe of Benjamin was almost exterminated because of a horrible deed perpetrated against the handmaid of a Levite travelling through Gibeah. A proud tribe was reduced to about six hundred men after mass extermination of over twenty-five thousand of their valiant warriors (Jud. 20:46).

Throughout the history of the Old Testament we find Israel floundering in trials brought about by their disobedience to God. The consequences of the weak and wicked spiritual condition of God’s people followed them into desperate ends. Ten of the tribes of Israel were eventually taken into Assyrian captivity to become, by the time of Christ, the hated Samaritans. The southern kingdom of Judah would also be taken into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

PRACTICAL LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE

The Bible does not relate accounts such as are recorded in the book of Judges just for the pleasure of the reader. The accounts so given have a very valuable and critical application for God’s people in every age—including our own. There are lessons of vital importance to which we should give our attention. May we suggest the following as deterrents to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Teach Our Children About God

It is obvious that the children of Israel failed to convey to their children the love, honor, fear, appreciation, respect, and adoration for God that they should have. Folklore is a part of the cherished heritage of

men. All of us are grateful for the part our forefathers played in bringing us to where we are today. We should rightfully honor our ancestors for their diligence to pave the way for the character each of us demonstrates in our lives, if they are in harmony with God's Word. Our parents endured hardships we do not comprehend to provide for us the necessities of life, as did their parents before them. We are not that far removed from pre-electronic days. Many can even now remember the horse and buggy era. It is healthy to know about, remember, and respect the legacy left to us by our ancestry. History is a vital part of our culture and provides us with knowledge of the past that is so necessary to the success of the future.

As interesting and beneficial as the knowledge of our past may be, it is nothing in comparison to the knowledge of our relationship with and dependency upon God. The hope we have of eternal life not only gives us the peace by which we can enjoy physical life, but the anticipation and confidence of much better things to come. The apostle Paul gives an ominous and somber word picture existence of those who "were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). It is a terrible tragedy, indeed, to contemplate physical life "having no hope, and without God." That is precisely the situation if we do not teach our children, and all others to whom we have opportunity to teach, about God.

It is a dying practice to have family devotionals anymore. Please, for the sake of all that is holy, do not demean and belittle the sacred terminology for the flippant and colloquial vernacular *devo* as we reference the privilege of devotion to our God and to His Son, our Savior. Devotional times should be cherished as a time when the family can come together to offer prayers, songs, and teaching in worship. The benefit of such devotion: (1) serves to express our love to God for His unspeakable grace to us; (2) strengthens our individual faith thus providing peace of mind for our soul; (3) teaches our children the importance of taking time each day to think about God and to express our loyalty and appreciation for all that He has done for us; (4) shows our children that we are not ashamed to own our Lord and to serve Him faithfully; (5) emphasizes to our children our acknowledgment that we are not self-sufficient, and that we depend entirely upon God for our very existence; (6) strengthens our

faith and character and arms us for our fight against Satan and his influences.

If our children can see in us the happiness, security, and peace that comes from our worship of God and service in His kingdom, it will serve them well in their lives and in the discharge of their own responsibility to their children. Omit one link in the chain of parental responsibility to teach our children about God, and it will result in the same tragic departure of which we read in Judges 2:10. Paul admonished: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Teach Our Children To Follow God, Not Men

It is imperative that we teach our children about God, as discussed above. But, it is also imperative that we teach them to follow God instead of men. Men must teach, but if men teach doctrines foreign to the doctrine of Christ, then error follows. Jesus taught that following men is “vain worship” (Mat. 15:9). Many verses warn against the teaching of men if their teaching is not in harmony with the Bible. John states:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Paul writes: “Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20).

Men often try to exalt their own wisdom in rejection to God’s wisdom. The first three chapters of 1 Corinthians treat the folly of human wisdom when compared to the wisdom of God. The consequences of human wisdom always result in division among men and departure from God.

The faith of untold numbers of brethren has been destroyed because they have placed their faith in men. Men are fallible; men are carnal. Men sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Those who place their faith in men are often disillusioned when their idols disappoint them. It is at those times when an undaunted faith in Jesus is so critical. Men fail, but our Lord does not. The Hebrews writer states: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8).

The world's religious condition reflects the result of men following men. Every denomination is the product of the wisdom of men. Jesus did not build multiple churches for the approval of hundreds, even thousands, of men. He built only one church (Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4). Men have disagreed with His principles and commandments and have started their own brand of religion. Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and has alone the prerogative of determining the terms of entrance into it. No one else has the privilege of circumventing the authority of Christ Jesus (Mat. 28:18; John 12:48).

In our text, the children of Israel "did what was right in their own eyes." They suffered because of their disbelief in God. We must teach our children to follow God, rather than men, to avoid the same cataclysmic result.

We Must Teach Our Children To Be Leaders In The Church

One of the big problems in the early history of God's people after the death of Joshua and the elders of that period was that there were no leaders to take charge. Joshua had been faithful in his service under the leadership of Moses. When Moses died, Joshua became the leader of the Israelites. In effect, Moses had *trained* Joshua for the responsibility of leading the children of Israel when the time came for him to be replaced. It is unfortunate that Joshua did not do the same for the time of his own departure. All the Bible tells us is that when Joshua died and the elders of that time, there arose another generation which knew not God.

It is common to see the name of a business bearing the name of its owner "& Son." In the time when family businesses were more common than the current day of conglomerates and huge corporations, fathers took pride in training their sons to take over the business when it came time for them to step down. That practice is still happening today. Some businesses have been in the same family for generations and are still going. We also see the responsibilities of parents being discharged in the training of children in etiquette, honesty, integrity, morality, purity, and other facets of secular life. Parents who love their children want to see them prosper and be representative of them in society. It is a proud parent who sees his/her son or daughter singled out for recognition for something done for the good of others.

We are also made aware of our responsibility as parents to see that our children are trained in the high and holy service in God's kingdom.

Men need to be prepared to lead God's people. Elders are not qualified accidentally for the office they fill. They must reflect a history of home life, character, and reputation that makes an elder a respected leader.

Men need to be prepared for the exalted service as preachers in the kingdom of God. Preachers do not just happen! They must be equipped to preach the Word in truth. Paul exhorted Timothy to "take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). Preaching involves knowledge of the Bible in addition to the ability to proclaim the gospel. As mentioned earlier, Paul charged Timothy that "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Preachers are going to preach what they have learned. Peter reflected the basis of acceptable life thus: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the **knowledge** of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Knowledgeable elders and properly prepared preachers would make it difficult for false teachers (1 John 4:1) to gain a foothold among the brethren to lead them astray. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of impending apostasy after his departure (Acts 20:29). Paul's warning was not sufficient to stop the apostasy that came. Neither will just warning our people stop another apostasy. It will take intensive study (2 Tim. 2:15) and training (Pro. 22:6) to arm the church (Eph. 6:10ff) for the work for which each generation is responsible. If such preparation is not done by our generation, we will be responsible for another generation, which knows neither God nor His mighty works.

Teach Our Children The Value of Example And Influence

Example of good is always good. The principle of bearing spiritual fruit is couched in all that is good: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). Paul says that against these things there is no law. All of these qualities are attributes that will make for a happy and peaceful life for their possessor and will be a blessing to those with whom he has to do. Joshua was a good example for all those who were associated with him. He challenged the Jews to serve Jehovah (Jos. 24:15). He was one of the two spies, sent into the Promised Land to spy out the land God had given them, who brought back a positive report. His example was a guiding light to the

people, and they followed him. He led them across the Jordan River at God's command. He followed God's instructions as he conquered Canaan. It was he who divided the land according to the tribes. Now his work was done. All the time he lived, he was the right example to the people he led.

Courage was necessary for Joshua to command such respect through his example. His example was one of respect for, faith in, and obedience to the commandments of God. What military commander would consider marching his army around a city one time per day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day, blow a trumpet and shout loudly, as a means of conquering the city? Yet, that is what God commanded Joshua to do to the city of Jericho. It takes courage for one today to stand for right in the face of so much temptation to do otherwise. Joshua's example still stands for us today as one of great conviction and courage.

Influence comes as a result of example. One can be a good example without being a good influence, but it is not possible to be a good influence without being a good example. A good influence is that which is necessary to shape another's will. Paul admonished Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Also, he wrote to the church in Philippi: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phi. 4:9).

It is really impossible to know how far-reaching our influence can be for good or how devastating our influence can be for evil. Souls can become contaminated with the evil behavior of one that was thought to be upright and trustworthy. Disillusionment can wreck the faith of a person not yet grounded in the truth. Every new Christian, a babe in Christ (1 Pet. 2:2), needs to have the good influence of a sound, faithful Christian to help him in his study of the Bible. Spiritual growth is expected of one who is new, or weak, in the faith (Heb. 5:12-14).

In our time, the focus of interest is directed to self. The "me generation" concept of selfish interests is still in vogue. There is no value in self-interest. For true fulfillment and sense of worth, there needs to be an appreciation for a good example and the impact of the proper and wholesome influence that one can have upon someone else.

It was only after the good influence of Joshua's good example was gone that the children of Israel forgot about God and the great works He did in Egypt.

Teach Our Children The Distinctiveness Of The Church

What makes Judges 2:10 such a sad verse is that those who "knew not God" were from God's own people. It is tragic that so many people know not God, hence do not His will, but for His own people to forget Him is truly tragic. Whether the generation who knew not God was the grandchildren of those who came out of Egypt, or a succeeding generation, does not really matter. It is the fact that, of all people, they ought to have been the ones to know what God did for their forefathers. A failure to teach each generation of children about God had occurred. Somewhere along the line parents neglected their responsibility to teach their children about the one and only God who delivered them out of Egyptian bondage and brought them into the Promised Land. How could this new generation be expected to honor and worship God?

Some sobering questions arise for us: What about our children? Will our children know about God? Will they know about Jesus who died so that our sins can be forgiven? What about the sacrifice that had to be offered to atone for the sins that will keep us out of heaven? Will our children know about that sacrifice and what it means? Will it make any difference to them whether there is only one church or many? Will our children care which church one should attend? What about the church that Jesus promised to build (Mat. 16:18)? Will our children know about the singularity and distinctiveness of the church that was purchased by the blood of Jesus? What about what takes place in the worship of God by His children? Will our children know how we should approach the worship assembly? Will they know that we are in the very presence of very God when we assemble? Will they know what kind of respect and honor God deserves as expressed by our actions, our dress, and our attitude? Will they know what we are to do in our worship of God? What kind of respect will our children have for the Bible and what the Bible teaches regarding the things we do in worship?

All of these things are so very vital and integral in the training we give our children. If we fail in our responsibilities, as did those in the days following the death of Joshua, there will be yet another generation that knows not God and the mighty works He has done for us. There will be

a generation that will lose their inheritance because of us. What a terrible consequence that would be.

CONCLUSION

The tragedy of the generation that is mentioned in Judges 2:10 that knew not God and the mighty works that He did should send chills up and down our spines. How could such a thing happen? The truth of the matter is that it is not too far removed from our own time. There is a growing departure from truth even in the church of our Lord today. Many are following after their lust for pleasure, acceptance, convenience, individuality, materialism, and many other idols. The undertow of Satan is powerful, and it is sweeping untold multitudes of God's children into the sea of iniquity.

Our responsibility is so important. We must not fail in our duty to ourselves, to our children, and our heritage to teach them (1) about God; (2) to follow God, not men; (3) to be leaders in the church; (4) the value of proper example and influence; and (5) the distinctiveness of the church of our Lord. If we teach our children properly, we will be able to hear Paul as he instructed Timothy: "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained" (1 Tim. 4:6).

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“CURSE YE MEROZ” JUDGES 5:23

Lynn Parker



Lynn Parker is a native of San Marcos, Texas. He and his wife, Mary Ann, have four children: Caroline, Hannah, Garland, and Rebekah. Lynn has been preaching the gospel since the age of 14 years, and is currently one of the evangelists for the Spring Church of Christ at Spring, Texas. He is the Assistant Director of the Houston College of the Bible, and a staff writer for *Contending For The Faith*. Lynn has also done local mission work in Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

The conflict was becoming old hat to England as the German war machine rolled over cities and countries. Like America, certain European countries thought early on that they could be neutral and side-step the growing war. While commending Finland for energetic resistance against the Nazi invasion, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill chided those with a policy of non-involvement saying, “Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, that the crocodile will eat him last.”

To seek peace is noble under many circumstances. No right thinking person seeks conflict, confrontation, war, battle, carnage, suffering, and wounds. But still we can be faced with a conflict that is unavoidable unless we are willing to surrender a principle or cause. The Psalmist wrote, “I am *for* peace: But when I speak, they are for war” (Psa. 120:7).¹ From Paul’s pen we read, “If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18). This author wants to be at peace with all men yet he realizes that he cannot force the other man to be a lover of peace. This scribe can be flexible in matters of opinion, but he dares not bend in matters of truth. Yes, sometimes the battle is unavoidable—the war is thrust upon us. It is then that conviction and right require the unsheathing of swords and a line to be drawn in the

sand! Courage demands action! But what about those who just will not fight?

BACKGROUND

The setting for our study is the dark ages of Israel's history. The book of Judges records some three and one-half centuries marked by a cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, then deliverance. Still, we read there of some bright days and faithful followers of Jehovah. The Bible account commences with the sad commentary, "And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, when Ehud was dead" (Jud. 4:1). Because of their sin, they are given over to twenty years of oppression by Jabin, King of Canaan. Deborah, the prophetess and judge, calls Barak to lead ten thousand Israelites against Jabin and his general, Sisera. The victory is promised (Jud. 4:7) and God always keeps His Word.

And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles, unto the river Kishon. And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which Jehovah hath delivered Sisera into thy hand; is not Jehovah gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. And Jehovah discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot, and fled away on his feet (Jud. 4:13-15).

By the hand of the Lord, Israel prevails, and the army of Sisera is defeated. Exhausted, Sisera meets his end after a last drink of milk and at the point of tent peg (Jud. 4:19-21). So Jabin is defeated. The Israelites are delivered from oppression. But what about those who just will not fight?

MEROZ CURSED

Let us picture in our mind's eye the day of battle. The warriors of Israel put the Canaanites to flight. Jabin's general is seeking a place of refuge in Jael's tent, away from the battlefield. God's people are ultimately victorious, but they are victors in spite of—not because of—the inhabitants of Meroz. Meroz no longer stands, and it is mentioned but once in the Bible. Holy writ gives this censure for generations to read: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of Jehovah. Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, Because they came not to the help of Jehovah, To the help of Jehovah against the mighty" (Jud. 5:23).

Did Meroz Do Evil?

It is obvious that Meroz had committed grievous sin. But notice, please, that the inspired record does not explicitly accuse Meroz of aiding Jabin and his army. It does not charge the city’s inhabitants with armed rebellion against Israel. Were they heathens at the time of this great battle? There is no biblical evidence to support such an idea. Yet the Scripture shows a curse leveled at Meroz.

Why was Meroz *bitterly* cursed? As previously stated: “Because they came not to the help of Jehovah, To the help of Jehovah against the mighty.” Imagine that! The anathema of heaven was directed at people who did not aid God’s own in the heat of a great battle between good and evil. No, the inspired record does not explicitly accuse Meroz of aiding Jabin and his army. But if there are only two sides in every conflict—right and wrong, good and evil—where did God categorize the people of Meroz? By failing to act and help Israel—for whatever reasons—Meroz became an enemy of God!

PACIFISM IN TIME OF WAR

Some have suggested that Meroz could have cut off the escape path of Sisera’s soldiers, thus aiding the Israelites. Another might say that Meroz could have added her men to Israel while the battle was at its zenith. The particulars are not given past what we find in the book of Judges, and it does not matter. When faced with one of the many tests that come to all in life, Meroz failed.

Do What We Can

Implied in the condemnation of Meroz was that the people there had **opportunity** and **ability** to help in the just cause of the Israelites. We know that God never commands that which is impossible for man to do. His commands are not out of man’s reach. “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off” (Deu. 30:11). Moses could indeed deliver a message to Pharaoh, though he was not initially a willing messenger.

And Moses said unto Jehovah, Oh, Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And Jehovah said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh *a man* dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, Jehovah? (Exo. 4:10-11).

Opportunity plus ability always equal responsibility. So the man—or the city—that can, must! Paul wrote, “So then, as we have op-

portunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10). *Opportunity* tells us that is the **right time** to act. Opportunities do not always come clearly marked, and they are less often *found* than they are created by those who seek to do good. Seizing the moment requires vigilance—perhaps even militancy. Some never have an opportunity to serve God because they do not make the opportunity. Many fail because their eyes are closed to the principles of duty, service, and obligation.

Is Fear an Excuse?

Was Meroz afraid of Jabin and his forces? That would not be unlikely. Jabin had “mightily oppressed” Israel for two decades (Jud. 4:3). One like that earns a reputation as tough guy on the block. But remember, Meroz is cursed for failing to help. The unavoidable conclusion then is that, if fear caused Meroz’s decision, it is still no excuse for failing to obey the Lord.

In the parable of the talents, our Lord clearly taught that fear will not be accepted as an excuse on the day of reckoning.

*For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. In like manner he also that *received* the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that *received* the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and **I was afraid**, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. But his lord answered and said unto him, **Thou wicked and slothful servant**, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. Take ye away therefore the*

talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (Mat. 25:14-30).

The one talent man was afraid; thus he did no good with that entrusted to his care. He did not lose the talent—the Lord received it back. But neither did he progress and profit from the opportunity before him. Make no mistake about it—**fear damns souls**. It may have been the downfall of Meroz, or perhaps a contributing factor. It certainly paralyzes individual members of the church and sometimes entire congregations. Fear can cause a congregation to become worried about the repercussions from men instead of doing what is right. Let this author give a few examples. See if any of these sound familiar.

A congregation has a disorderly member in their midst. Some family members and friends, also members of the congregation, would be as mad as an "ol' wet hen" if the ungodly brother was disciplined. They might quit contributing money, move their membership, or even become backsliders themselves. So what happens next? Nothing! Not one thing! The ungodly continues on in a good humor toward hell. The family and friends are pacified. The boat is not rocked. God's commands in the matter are ignored. And then comes Judgment Day, and the elders and congregation find themselves answering for failure to act.

The preacher preaches a sermon on the sin of denominationalism and he calls the name of a denomination from the pulpit. He presents a fair and accurate representation of the denomination's beliefs. But some "too kind" sister in the congregation rakes him over the coals for name-calling. She does not want her Baptist or Methodist garden club friends offended when they visit. She would rather the sermon be preached in such a way that no one feels it was directed at their error and no one makes personal application. Of course, no one comes out of error from such preaching, either. Forget that there is ample Bible precedent for calling the names of individuals or groups in error. So, to placate the weak and ignorant, the elders (or men of the congregation where no elders exist) forbid the preacher to call names of denominations from the pulpit.

A woman teaches a children's Bible class on Sunday morning, yet the congregation is fully aware that she will be careless in attendance at other services, she frequents the dance-floor, and she is known generally to be a very worldly person. The right thing would be to remove

her from the position of teacher but some cowardly souls say, “If she doesn’t get to teach, she’ll quit attending altogether.” Her example makes a mockery of the responsibility of Bible teachers, but she will remain in the class all because some fear where the “chips may fall” from doing the right thing.

A preacher withholds the “whole counsel of God” and shrinks back from declaring everything needful and profitable for the church because he fears the backlash of the ungodly, the doctrinally weak, and the worldly. He takes pains to avoid truth in areas that some term as controversial. Too much disruption of the *status quo* may cost the preacher his healthy weekly paycheck. What a far different picture is painted by the apostle in regard to his work:

And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews; **how I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.** And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more. **Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.** Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years **I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears.** And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build *you* up, and to give *you* the inheritance among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:18-32).

Spare us from such cowards! They have the opportunity to teach the truth, thus strengthening the church, but they fear to do right. It may cost too much.

In each of these examples, and many more situations we might name, fear can stop good from being done. It is pertinent to study here Revelation 21:8,

But for the **fearful**, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, **their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.**

The fearful must be exhorted to be of courage. They must remember that God will not fail or forsake them. Do what is right, then let those chips fall! Paul knew the Lord would be with him and everything would ultimately work out just fine.

For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline. Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God (2 Tim. 1:7-8).

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord will render to him according to his works: of whom do thou also beware; for he greatly withstood our words. At my first defence no one took my part, but all forsook me: may it not be laid to their account. But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Tim. 4:14-18).

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31-39).

Neutrality

Apparently some brethren see nobility in neutrality; God does not. When it comes to the precious "faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), the Lord's faithful army rises up quickly and

decisively to meet opponents. It does not look at a battle for truth as a battle for someone else, somewhere else, to fight.

If you asked the apostle Paul how rapid a response error demands, you find the answer readily apparent.

And I went up by revelation; and I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but privately before them who were of repute, lest by any means I should be running, or had run, in vain. But not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of the false brethren privily brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: **to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you** (Gal. 2:2-5).

Paul was “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phi. 1:16). The truth would, in the first century (and does now), come under attack. “For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phi. 3:18). What shall we do? Shall we ignore the false teachers? Some do, and they count it a mark of merit that they are involved in no conflict. Astounding! After holding a gospel meeting away from home, one bold, faithful gospel preacher was greeted by a woman of that congregation who indignantly said, “*Our preacher doesn’t make people mad. Everybody likes him.*” The preacher questioned in reply, “*Even the devil?*”

There are things true and things untrue. Some believe that the book of Hebrews was written by Paul. Some do not. It either was or was not written by Paul. But is there any brother or sister, anywhere, that would claim such was an issue affecting salvation? No, of course not. God obligates us to do certain things in a certain way. If any doctrine causes brethren to do that which is forbidden by heaven, it is a fatal false doctrine. If any doctrine causes us to fall short of that which we are obligated by God to do, it is a fatal false doctrine. A false doctrine can overthrow the faith of others. A good example is found in 2 Timothy 2:16-18:

But shun profane babblings: for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a gangrene: of whom is Hymenaeus an Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some.

The attitude of Meroz says, “Let ‘em alone.” The Bible commands otherwise. Love for souls demands otherwise. Concerning the duty of elders, Paul wrote:

holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gain-sayers. For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake (Tit. 1:9-11).

And in the same letter Paul commanded: “This testimony is true. For which cause reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13). It will not do for brethren, families, and entire congregations to look at the current digression and adopt a Swedish policy of non-involvement.

Practical Neutrality

Idolatrous Israel in Jeremiah’s day has been aptly termed a nation of “practical atheists.” They claimed to believe in Jehovah, but their works and tenor of life showed the opposite. Might we coin the term “practical neutrality” to describe the policy adopted by some congregations, preachers, and other members of the church?

A not too hypothetical example is appropriate here. The Anytown congregation says, “We stand for truth!” Along comes Rubel Shelly and his crew looking for disciples. Some at the Anytown congregation privately say, “We do not agree with Rubel Shelly and that sort of doctrine.” Now comes Perditiontown 20 miles away, and they invite Shelly (or one of his like-minded cohorts) to hold an area youth meeting. A third congregation, Faithfultown, writes the elders at Perditiontown saying, “We stand for truth. We cannot fellowship this error. We cannot fellowship you if you persist in this.” Anytown does not utter a peep of objection. Anytown says, “We stand for truth, but it’s not our business.” And that is it—nothing else is said. Privately over coffee, an Anytown elder says, “We did not agree with Perditiontown.” But where were they when stalwart, faithful brethren were trying to stem the tide and influence of error? Where was their love for the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17)? Is our concern only as broad as the four walls of the local church building? And too, are our members—especially our young people—well-served when they leave the “home congregation” and move off to a city where error abounds? How did we get in this predicament throughout the brotherhood? The spirit of Meroz lives on in so many elderships and congregations that adopt a policy of supposed neutrality. It is this spirit of Meroz that has contributed to and facilitated the

digression we now face. It serves the cause of Satan—never the cause of God.

One wrote, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” The point is well made. In the Old Testament we read of two tribes who were more than willing to be satisfied with their own possession while others battled on.

And they said, If we have found favor in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession; bring us not over the Jordan. And Moses said unto the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, **Shall your brethren go to the war, and shall ye sit here?** And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which Jehovah hath given them? Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which Jehovah had given them. And Jehovah’s anger was kindled in that day, and he sware, saying, Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun; because they have wholly followed Jehovah (Num. 32:5-12).

Such a stinging rebuke! “Shall your brethren go to the war, and shall ye sit here?” More than a few are willing reap the benefits of past warrior’s efforts but they will not themselves fight. Moses told the tribes of Gad and Reuben that such action was a discouragement just as in the Numbers account of the ten faithless spies (Num. 13-14).

Where are we when men teach that there are sincere, knowledgeable, devout Christians in all denominations? Or when they teach that the Lord’s church is one more denomination among many? What objection is raised when so-called “Christian colleges” endorse false teachers as faculty members that teach error on the purpose and essentiality of baptism? Is our voice silent when impressionable youth are told that instrumental music in worship is a matter of opinion and tradition, and not a salvation issue?

We have rightly, biblically stood for years against Calvinism and its attendant doctrine calling for a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the human heart. What shall we say then when a doctrine arises from our midst claiming that the Holy Spirit works directly on the Christian’s heart to do that which the inspired Word cannot? Surely this would never cause one to expect God to do that which God obligates the Christian to do for himself—or would it? Of course the danger is clear.

Are we alarmed that some brethren are teaching that in some sense, all in life, except for sin, is worship? After all, what harm can it do except to “overthrow the faith of some?” We should be alarmed! Forget past reputations of those promoting error and rise up in righteous indignation, saying, “This shall not pass!”

The spirit of Meroz is not

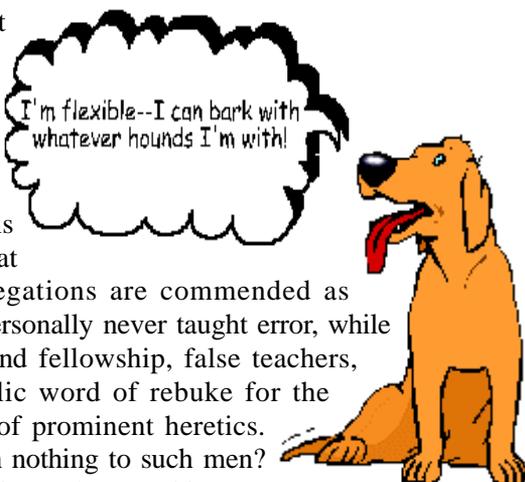
necessarily the spirit that teaches error. It just has a “kindler, gentler” approach to error that soft-soaps truth and is as silent as the tomb when time to object. It is

most strange to see that some men and congregations are commended as faithful because they personally never taught error, while they hold hands with, and fellowship, false teachers, and never utter a public word of rebuke for the publicly taught errors of prominent heretics.

Does 2 John 9-11 mean nothing to such men?

Does absence of error in one’s preaching mean

that he is faithful? The curse of Meroz teaches exactly the opposite. By failing to aid the faithful, one then aids God’s enemies. Silence is not always golden!



The Work of the Church and Meroz

In other aspects of the Lord’s work we can see the sin of Meroz present and serving as a weight on the back of the church. Laodicea was never accused of doctrinal error but sternly rebuked for being lukewarm (Rev. 3:15ff). An entire generation of young people are being reared with a concept of Christianity that gives the Lord’s church as much priority as participation in a fraternal order—if that much! Attend services on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night (if you can and if you feel like it) and that is it—you are done, you get your check mark for the week! Speak of a hot dog party and 40 show up. Ask for door-knockers to distribute tracts and six are present. The spirit of Meroz says that others can do the work while we sit here and bask in our self-satisfaction and complacency. If the inhabitants of Meroz were in the church today, they might say, “What Macedonian call? We didn’t hear anything.”

While time is fleeting and souls are at stake, those like Meroz do nothing to help the cause of a nail-scarred hand! We search for men who want to preach the gospel, but precious and few are the numbers who step forward. Congregations need well-grounded teachers and elders but are spiritually dying because of the drought.

CONCLUSION

Meroz is not on the map today. Meroz is mentioned just once in the Bible, and that with a curse for failing to come to the help of the Lord's cause. Its inhabitants have long since perished from the earth. They, like all of mankind, await that great day in which they will give answer for their lack of action. When the Bible tells us, "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4), "Now these things were our examples" (1 Cor. 10:6), and, "these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11), then you and I had better sit up and take note. You do not want to be guilty of the sin of Meroz. Let non-combatants pick up their sword and join the battle. The days are passing, heaven is watching, and Judgment draws nearer.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

“NO KING IN ISRAEL”

JUDGES 17:6

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr., was born March 7, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lla Laline Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss began preaching in 1942.

Guss attended Pepperdine College in Los Angeles and Southwest State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Missouri. He also has preached in over twenty-five countries and twenty-six states. He served as a missionary in Hong Kong for two years. In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home. In 1995, he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

He conducted the first television program for churches of Christ in Northern California and has conducted weekly programs in California and Texas. He also conducted daily radio programs as well as weekly programs in California, Oregon, Texas, and Louisiana.

In 1997, Guss and his wife, Laline, moved to Llano, Texas. He speaks on about six lectureships each year.

INTRODUCTION

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jud. 17:6).¹ It was indeed a sad statement that Israel had no king. First of all, it was sad that God’s own people were not content with God’s leading. They did not have a king; so they wanted to be like the nations round about them. The nations around them had kings; so Israel having no king, wanted one.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah; and they said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto Jehovah. And Jehovah said unto Samuel, hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their

voice: howbeit thou shalt protest solemnly unto them, and shalt show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them (1 Sam. 8:4-9).

But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay: but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

And Jehovah said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city (1 Sam. 8:22).

After all that God had done for Israel, she rejected God's way of leading and demanded a king.

But ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saveth you out of all your calamities and your distresses; and ye have said unto him, *Nay*, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before Jehovah by your tribes, and by your thousands (1 Sam. 10:19).

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you (1 Sam.12:1).

And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, *Nay*, but a king shall reign over us; when Jehovah your God was your king (1 Sam.12:12).

Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call unto Jehovah, that he may send thunder and rain; and ye shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of Jehovah, in asking you a king (1 Sam. 12:17).

And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto Jehovah thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins *this* evil, to ask us a king (1 Sam. 12:19).

God had directed His people through judges in Israel, but they were not content with God's leading. They wanted a king to judge them like the nations round about them.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah; and they said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto Jehovah (1 Sam. 8:4-6).

Jehovah had already foretold just such a thing happening.

When thou art come unto the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me; thou shalt

surely set him king over thee, whom Jehovah thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, who is not thy brother (Deu.17:14-15).

It must be noted that before a king was to judge Israel, God's own people had turned to do that which was evil. They had rebelled against that which God demanded. This turning to evil was done while there were still judges in Israel. "And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and forgot Jehovah their God, and served the Baalim and the Asheroth" (Jud. 3:7). "And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, when Ehud was dead" (Jud. 4:1).

God's own people had demanded a king to rule and judge them. This in itself is a "Sad Statement in the Bible." How sad it was for Israel to reject God's council and leadership by judges. "And Jehovah said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7).

Another sad statement is found in Judges 17:6, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Because Israel had rejected God during the time of the judges, it may have been hoped that they would turn back to God when there was a king in Israel. It is to be noticed that God stated twice that there was no king in Israel. The first time is in our text (Jud. 17:6) but then to emphasize that fact, it is repeated in Judges 18:1.

In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day *their* inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel (Jud. 18:1).

Note also Judges 19:1.

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the farther side of the hill-country of Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem-judah (Jud. 19:1).

ISRAEL WAS DETERMINED TO HAVE A KING

Samuel, God's judge, told Israel of all that would be involved in having a king. A king would require their sons to be put into his service.

Their sons would be pressed into battle to drive chariots, to be foot soldiers for the king. Their sons would plow fields and reap the harvest for such a ruler. A king would take their fields and olive yards, even the choice ones, and give them to his officers. He would demand a tenth of the harvest and take the best of flocks and herds. The daughters of Israel would be conscripted and compelled to be cooks, bakers, and perfumers. Samuel warned Israel that the time would come when they would cry out because of the demands of a king that ruled them. Israel refused to harken to Samuel's pleading.

But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay: but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

Israel was determined: "But we will have a king over us." How sad! Why was Israel so determined to have a king? Was it only to be like the nations around her?

WHAT WOULD BE THE ADVANTAGE OF A KING?

The writer of the book of Judges seems to imply that the reason for Israel's sin and rebellion was because she had no king. In the first five verses of the seventeenth chapter of Judges, we read of a mother and a son. This mother had eleven hundred pieces of silver. She found it missing and supposed that it had been stolen. She had purposed a curse upon the one that was guilty of stealing her property. Her son, Micah, confessed that he had stolen the silver, and he had it. This man was certainly not the faithful prophet of God, nor is he to be confused with the faithful Miciah, son of Imlah in 1 Kings 22.

Micah's mother said, "Blessed be my son of Jehovah" (Judges 17:2). Micah returned the silver to his mother, and she would dedicate the silver to Jehovah. Yet, she was going to use it to make a molten image and give it to her son. When Micah returned the silver to his mother, she only used two hundred pieces for the graven and molten image. Micah put these idols in his house. The Bible plainly states, "And the man Micah had a house of gods, and he made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest" (Jud. 17:5).

This Micah, the Ephraimite, and his mother gives us a picture of the moral and spiritual condition of people at that time. They had turned their backs on the commands of Jehovah. The Law specifically stated:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, *nor* any likeness of *anything* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I, Jehovah, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me (Deu. 5:7-9).

This man Micah and his mother violated the first of the Ten Commandments of Jehovah.

Micah brazenly lived in rebellion to God's instruction with reference to those serving in the office of a priest. When we read the twenty-eighth chapter of Exodus, it plainly tells of Aaron and his sons ministering as priests. The office and its duties are given in the Book of Exodus. Notice chapters twenty-eight through thirty. Much more could be said about the office of the Levites and the duties of priests. It is well noted that Micah certainly did not follow God's instruction concerning a priest, but instead consecrated a priest of his choosing, yea his own son.

What difference would a king make in all of this evil practice among God's own people? The writer of the book of Judges attributes the ungodly conduct of the people of Israel to the fact they had no king. But why would a king make a great difference? A king would set up a government! By the authority of the king, law and order would be maintained. Those who violated the law would be punished. Rights of people would be honored and protected. A king must rule so as to protect his kingdom and the subjects therein. If people rebel and violate the Law, they are punished.

Regardless of what men may say, punishment is a deterrent. It is quite evident that such conditions of law and order were not in vogue during the days of the judges. How sad! Even though God was their king, they were not satisfied. "And Jehovah said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7).

The leadership that God provided was superior to the judgment of one king or one ruler. If a matter was too difficult to judge by one, God gave a law to deal with such.

If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates; then shalt thou arise,

and get thee up unto the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days: and thou shalt inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment. And thou shalt do according to the tenor of the sentence which they shall show thee from that place which Jehovah shall choose; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall teach thee: according to the tenor of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do; thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left (Deu. 17:8-11).

The spiritual vision of the Divine King which had maintained the unity of the nation in the days of Moses was fading away, and now that sublime and unearthly government was nearly lost, there was no hope for the people but in the establishment of a human monarchy.²

Israel, no doubt, felt that a king would demand his subjects observe laws that were for the good of all the people. Man cannot be left to establish his own direction. He is too selfish, too self-centered, and is unable to comprehend what is best for all concerned. Jeremiah said, “O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). The wise man Solomon said, “A man’s goings are of Jehovah; How then can man understand his way?” (Pro. 20:24).

Human beings are so made that they have to respect authority. Man must have rules, and he must be subject to those rules. When he fails to obey the established law, he becomes a law to himself.

EVERY MAN DID THAT WHICH WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jud. 17:6).

Jehovah told Israel:

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if ye shall hearken unto the commandments of Jehovah your God, which I command you this day; and the curse, if ye shall not hearken unto the commandments of Jehovah your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known (Deu. 11:26-28).

If God’s own people would obey His commandments, they would be blessed. Should they refuse to obey and go after other gods, they would be cursed.

In the twelfth chapter of Deuteronomy, God tells Israel to destroy the nations and the false gods of those nations. They were to destroy all the altars where offerings were made to heathen gods. They were to burn their Asherim, the gods of trees or tree stumps, and their carvings to represent gods. Listed in this chapter is what God demanded His people do in offerings and sacrifices. Then Jehovah says:

Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes; for ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee (Deu. 12:8-9).

God has not given man the privilege of doing that which is right in his own eyes. When man takes upon himself to do what is right in his own eyes, he ends up in trouble. Micah, the Ephraimite, is a perfect example. He made a place to set his false gods and consecrated his own son as a priest.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF DOING RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES

Rebellious Israel made Jeroboam King over the Northern tribes.

And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now will the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, then will the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin; for the people went *to worship* before the one, even unto Dan. And he made houses of high places, and made priests from among all the people, that were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he went up unto the altar; so did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places that he had made. And he went up unto the altar which he had made in Beth-el on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart: and he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and went up unto the altar, to burn incense (1 Kin. 12:26-33).

Jeroboam's rebellion caused no end of trouble and problems. First, a man of God came from Judah to cry out against the altar at Bethel.

Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. When the man of God cried out as to the sign which Jehovah had spoken, Jeroboam put forth his hand to lay hold on God's prophet. When he did, his hand and arm dried up so he could not draw it back again. The altar was rent, and the ashes poured out as the man of God had spoken. Then Jeroboam begged the man of God to pray that his arm would be restored. When the man of God prayed, the King's hand was made whole.

The King invited the young prophet to go home with him and be refreshed and eat. The man of God told Jeroboam that God told him not to eat or drink in that place. He was not to return home the same way he went. However, there was an old prophet in Bethel. One of his sons saw the miracle of Jeroboam's hand. He went and told his father. The old prophet found the young prophet and invited him home to eat. The young prophet told him that God had prohibited him from doing so. The old prophet said unto him:

I also am a prophet as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water. *But* he lied unto him. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water (1 Kin. 13:18-19).

As a result, the young man was killed by a lion.

Jeroboam had his wife disguise herself and go to Ahijah, God's prophet. The son of Jeroboam had become ill, and Jeroboam wanted to know what would happen to him. The wife of Jeroboam did as her husband directed. Jehovah told Ahijah what was being done. Ahijah was blind, but he told Jeroboam's wife that he knew she had come to inquire about her son. He told her:

Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel: Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee; and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes, but hast done evil above all that were before thee, and hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every man-child, him that is shut up and him that is left at large in Israel, and will utterly sweep away the house of Jeroboam, as a man sweepeth away dung, till it be all gone. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that

dieth in the field shall the birds of the heavens eat: for Jehovah hath spoken it. Arise thou therefore, get thee to thy house: *and* when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward Jehovah, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam. Moreover Jehovah will raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now. For Jehovah will smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and he will root up Israel out of this good land which he gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking Jehovah to anger. And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he hath sinned, and wherewith he hath made Israel to sin. And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: *and* as she came to the threshold of the house, the child died. And all Israel buried him, and mourned for him, according to the word of Jehovah, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the prophet. And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead (1 Kin. 14:7-20).

Jeroboam went to battle against Abijah. Jeroboam had eight hundred thousand chosen men ready for battle. Abijah had only four hundred thousand mighty men of valor. Abijah stood upon Mount Zemaraim, in the hill country of Ephraim, and told Jeroboam that he had the golden calves which he made for gods. He also told how he appointed priests that were not from the Levites, and how he had burnt offerings and sacrifices that were not according to God's Law. Abijah told Jeroboam that they had followed God's instruction and to fight against him was to fight against Jehovah. He warned Jeroboam that he could not be victorious, "O children of Israel, fight ye not against Jehovah, the God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper" (2 Chr. 13:12b).

Jeroboam gave no heed to Abijah's warning, rather he planned an ambush and went to battle. God fought against Jeroboam! Abijah and his people slew five hundred thousand of Jeroboam's army. "Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and Jehovah smote him, and he died" (2 Chr. 13:20).

There are many cases in both Old and New Testaments of those who have done that which is right in their own eyes. As a result, they have suffered for it. The case of Aaron making a golden calf in Exodus 32 is

a perfect example, as does the instance of Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire in Leviticus 10. Too, this author must mention Ananias and Sapphira, who were Christians, in Acts 5.

WE HAVE A KING TODAY

Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16). Our King, Jesus Christ, has given us instruction as to how to worship and serve Him. We dare not turn to doing that which is right in our own eyes.

I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel; which is not another *gospel* only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema. For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? or am I striving to please men? if I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:6-10).

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

²W. F. Adeney, *The Pulpit Commentary, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges*, ed. A. C. Hervey (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 3:3:183.

ICHABOD

1 SAMUEL 4:21-22

Harold Bigham



Harold Bigham was born in Anniston, Alabama to Frank and Mary Lou Bigham. He is married to the former Rita Faye Holladay of DeFuniak Springs, Florida, and they have two children: Aaron Ross and Ashley Brooke.

He graduated from the Bellview Preacher Training School in Pensacola, Florida in 1984; Beville State Community College in Fayette, Alabama in 1990 with an A.S. degree in Data Processing; and from Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama in 1994 with a BBA (Bachelor in Business Administration). Harold began full-time preaching in 1984 and has preached in North Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama. He is presently working with the Liberty

Church of Christ in DeFuniak Springs, Florida. Harold's twin brother, Howell, is also a gospel preacher.

And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken (1 Sam. 4:21-22).¹

INTRODUCTION

Eli was God's High Priest in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:9; 14:3) and was one of the judges in Israel. During the days of Eli, the children of Israel went to war against their enemy, the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). The Philistines were victorious in the first battle. About four thousand Israelite soldiers were killed. Israel retreated and fled the battle scene. Mighty Israel was humiliated by a foreign people. The elders of Israel reflected on their dismal situation and made the decision to send to Shiloh for the direct purpose of bringing back the Ark of the Covenant. They reasoned that victory would be attained by the mere presence of the Ark of God.

The Ark of God was sent for and was brought back into the camp. Along with the Ark of God came Eli's two wicked priests and sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were "sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:12). A great and enthusiastic shout of hope and reassurance came forth from the hearts of the children of Israel when the Ark

of God came into the camp. The nearby Philistines heard the shouts of hope and became frightened and disillusioned. But the newfound assurance of Israel was misguided, as was also the fear of the Philistines. Israel suffered even greater defeat and shame during the next battle between the two groups. Thirty thousand footmen of Israel were slain. Thirty thousand! What an embarrassment for the children of God to go down into defeat and lose such a massive number of footmen!

The greatest consequence of all was that the Philistines had captured and taken the Ark of God. In this defeat, the two wicked sons of Eli were killed as well. News of the defeat had reached Shiloh. Aged and blind Eli, now being ninety-eight years old, was told of the news and fell backward. As a result of the fall, he broke his neck and died. Phinehas' wife was "was with child, *near* to be delivered" (1 Sam. 4:19). There could be no happiness in her eyes concerning the anticipation of being a mother. To now hear about the news surrounding the capture of the Ark of God and the deaths of her husband and father-in-law were too much of a burden to bear. The emotional stress and strain not only would cause a premature birth, but it also took her very life. There were women near her in her last hours, encouraging her with the news of her son's birth but unto her there was nothing to rejoice about. As the child was born and as she was approaching death, she named the child Ichabod. Could it be that this mother had a greater perception of what had actually happened to the children of Israel than anyone else? She realized that the glory had departed from Israel! The name Ichabod means: "There is no glory." All glory had departed from Israel and from her loved ones. God had said that He would do a thing in Israel that would tingle the ears of everyone that heard about it—and He did! (1 Sam. 2:34-36; 3:11-14).

It is a sad statement when God's people lose their identity and become Ichabod. It is tragic when God's people cease to be faithful and no longer are recognized as a unique and distinctive people. The Bible gives us numerous examples of those who became Ichabod.

INDIVIDUALLY THERE WERE THOSE WHO BECAME ICHABOD

Samson rebelled against Jehovah and "wist not that the LORD was departed from him" (Jud. 16:20). How humiliating and sad it was for Samson to lose his strength and to have his eyes put out by the Philistines.

David, a Man after God's own heart, did not behave as such when he became an adulterer, conspirator, and a murderer. After being shown his transgressions by Nathan who told him "Thou *art* the man" (2 Sam 12:7), David repented of his actions and once again became faithful to His God.

Ananias and Sapphira lied unto God and were guilty of covetousness (Acts 5). They became unfaithful because of the evil deeds they conceived in their hearts and ultimately carried out in their actions. They died as a result of their sins.

CONGREGATIONS OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE CAN BECOME UNFAITHFUL AND BECOME ICHABOD

The Lord's church at Ephesus had a wonderful beginning (Acts 19) and had many complimentary things said about them (Acts 20:17-38; Ephesians). Yet, Paul warned the elders of Ephesus of apostasy (Acts 20:28-31). When we come to the time of Revelation, consider what the Spirit says (Rev. 2 :1-7). The Scriptures state:

Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

The church at Ephesus was admonished by the Lord to repent because they had become unfaithful by leaving their first love.

We do not know a great deal about the church at Laodicea, we can consider her state as revealed by the apostle John (Rev. 3:14-22). This congregation was neither cold nor hot but in a state of lukewarmness. They were complacent and really did not care one way or the other. The Lord rebuked them for their unfaithfulness and admonished them to repent.

Any people or congregation who walk not according to God's Word also will become Ichabod.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Therefore, a congregation of the Lord's people can become unfaithful! The candlestick can be removed, and then the glory is gone! The factor of faithfulness is determined by a compulsion of love to always follow and obey the Word of God without addition or subtraction.

Let us notice Ichabod in regard to the church and make some applications for us today.

WHEN THE CHURCH IS NOT WHAT IT IS SUPPOSED TO BE IN ITS UNIQUENESS, IT IS ICHABOD

The Church Is Unique Because Of the Price That Was Paid for it

The church is bought by the blood of Christ. That makes it unique. It is distinctive. Paul related to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus these words: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The denominational bodies of mankind cannot enjoy this uniqueness because Christ did not die for them! Not one drop of His rich, red, ruby blood was shed for a denomination! Therefore, we in the body of Christ, should recognize the seriousness of our responsibility before us to keep the church unique as God would have it.

The Church Is Unique in its Name

The name shows ownership. The church belongs to Christ and He is the head of it (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ told Peter: "That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it" (Mat. 16:18). Peter said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Paul wrote, "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). Since the church is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; John 3:29; Eph. 5:27), then the name should denote the bridegroom which is Christ. There are those among us who have a desire to change the name of the church. They are the change agents who desire not to walk in the Old Paths but to create New Paths which are not authorized by the Word of God. Instead of referring to the church as the "church of Christ," they prefer using some term which is not distinctive but is more generic. They are ashamed of using a term that would make a distinction and show

uniqueness. For example, if the congregation is located at Davis Street they might use the phrase, “Davis Street Church—a body of Christ” instead of using “Davis Street Church of Christ.” By this method, the change agents have taken away the very name that shows the ownership (church of Christ) and replaced it by a generic statement saying that it is “a body of Christ.” Notice that “a body of Christ” can mean one among many in the change agent’s phraseology. They would include in their unity in diversity platform the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and any other religious group that would embrace mere faith in God. Yet the Bible speaks of God’s platform for unity and states that there is “one body” (Eph. 4:4). These religious groups wear a name that is “not of faith” (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6). Therefore, by de-emphasizing the scriptural name of the church and having a desire to “be like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:20), they have become an Ichabod.

The Church Is Unique in its Work

The work of the church is saving souls. This work is accomplished in three ways. The Scriptures authorize the church to preach to the lost (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16), to help the needy (Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10) and to edify or build up each fellow Christian in the most holy faith (Acts 20:32). To add to or to reduce from this work is to err. The gospel has been placed into our hands to teach or preach to the lost of the world. We can accomplish this by radio, television, tracts, lectureships, gospel meetings, and also through the means of the internet. It is the work of the church to make sure that the gospel is proclaimed to a lost and dying world. The early church went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4). We become an Ichabod when we fail to do this! Too many times, congregations of the Lord’s people have reclined backward in lives of luxury, storing huge amounts of money into the church treasury for a rainy day that will never come! Preachers desiring to enter the mission fields to convert the lost from Satan’s army to the army of Christ must travel all across this nation of ours to raise necessary living expenses to be able to survive. Time and untold money is spent by prospective missionaries only to listen to the answer that is often given that we just do not have the money or the money is already allocated for building maintenance or to pave the parking lot. Then we wonder why the church does not grow as it should!

In addition, the church is to take care of the needy which would also include the orphans and the widows (Gal. 6:10, Jam. 1:27). Also, when we edify and encourage each other and build each other up by our attendance, words, and works of kindness, then we are doing the work of the church.

Therefore, the work of the church is **not** to be recreational, social, political, or secular. The denominational world and some of our brethren are busy in participating in things without the approval of God.

These three works of the church make the church of Christ unique and different from the denominations of man. We become an Ichabod when we fail to do the work of the church either by a deliberate choice or being neglectful in our duties.

The Church Is Unique in its Organization

God has authorized that the church is to have as her head Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:23). Beneath Christ there are to be scripturally qualified men in each local congregation known as elders to oversee the church. Second, there are to be scripturally qualified men known as deacons who are appointed for the purpose of ministering to the needs that the church might have. Both the elders and deacons are to meet the specific qualifications that are outlined in the Bible according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Third, there are those men who are called preachers whose duty is to preach the Truth (2 Tim. 4:2). Finally, there is the remainder of the church made up of her members.

The Eldership of a Local Congregation Can Become an Ichabod

When an eldership refuses to uphold the hands of faithful, sound gospel preachers, they become Ichabod. Some elderships would rather fire than amen the preacher when he preaches on certain subjects such as Marriage-Divorce-Remarriage, Denominationalism, Unity In Diversity, Change Agents, and other topics that need to be dealt with.

Elders are to exhort and convince the gainsayer (Tit. 1:9). When they fail to do so, then they become Ichabod.

By withholding sound food for the congregation the elders and congregation will become Ichabod. Elders must provide the nourishment of God's Word to the flock so they can grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 5:2). This can be accomplished by the planning of gospel meetings, lectureships, gospel papers, radio programs, television programs, etc.

By not protecting the flock from the wolves (Mat. 7:15), either by inviting false teachers into the pulpit or making the lessons available by the writings of unsound men, will make them Ichabod.

God has given the church the obligation to be evangelistic. When an eldership fails to be evangelistic minded, they become Ichabod.

If not careful some elders can develop an attitude of preeminence and become a Diotrephes in the congregation. When this happens, the church suffers as a whole, and the Diotrephes is an Ichabod.

Gospel Preachers Can Become Ichabod

Preachers are to preach the Word. By filling up their sermons with jokes, stories, and nonsense rather than the clear explanation and exposition of the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Tim. 4:1-5), they become Ichabod.

When they preach false doctrine and lead brethren away from the Truth of Almighty God (Rom. 16:17-18), they are Ichabod and will make the congregation such.

When preachers refuse to exhibit the courage and boldness needed in preaching the gospel (Gal. 2:11-14), they become Ichabod.

Preachers refusing to preach the whole counsel of God because they are afraid of losing their job (1 Cor. 9:16) are Ichabod.

Preachers, as all, are to be more concerned about their Saviour and the lost souls of the world (Phi. 3:7-21). When a preacher becomes absorbed in self, then he becomes Ichabod.

Every sound and faithful gospel preacher should think about what Paul said in Galatians 6:14: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

The Church Is Unique in its Worship

Jesus taught the woman at the well that our worship must be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). *Spirit* denotes the correct attitude that one is to have in worshipping God and that it must be motivated by the true devotion of the heart. *Truth* is the Word of God (John 17:17), and all that we do must be according to what He has already specified for us to do in expressing our adoration and reverence toward Him in our worship.

There are five avenues of worship that are specified for Christians to do in their worship toward God on the first day of the week—Sunday. We are to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), pray (Acts 2:42), give (1 Cor.

16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7), partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7), and to preach or teach God's Word (Acts 2:42; 20:7).

The agenda of the change agent is to change the worship of the New Testament church. Listen to the quotes from a book written by Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris called, *The Second Incarnation*.² These quotes concern the worship of the church:

[It states that we must have a] raucous celebration...spontaneity (139).

Individuals, groups, and entire congregations [singing] (132).

Unavoidable [worship], shouts, dances (119).

One person or a small group singing to the larger (136).

Dramatic celebration of God (124).

A narcotic trip into another world (125).

When the Spirit of God is present, it will not always be possible to determine the atmosphere in advance. Leaders may intend and prepare for a service of one sort, and God may bring about another end to His glory (135).

The proponents of change have therefore insisted that we do things in worship that are different than that which has been approved by God in His Word. To the change agents the New Testament worship is boring and out of date. In their thinking, we must liven it up and become modern! The change agents are advocating that we clap our hands and hum. They also would add the mechanical instruments to our singing so the worship might sound better. They would also advocate the use of choruses, choirs, and soloists to replace congregational singing.

The change agents also have a desire to expand the role of women in the church to include them in leadership positions in the worship services. The change agents would like to have women to be song leaders, preachers, leaders in public prayer, and serving on the Lord's table. Yet the Scriptures state otherwise.

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (1 Tim. 2:11-14).

Scriptural worship in spirit and in truth has now been altered by the change agents to nothing more than entertainment. When we worship God, God is the audience, and we are to worship Him in reverence and godly fear.

WHEN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION IS CHANGED, THE CHURCH IS ICHABOD

God has commanded in His Word that for man to receive the forgiveness of his sins he must obey the gospel. Paul stated that “by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). By hearing the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believing in Christ (Mark 16:16), repenting of one’s sins (Acts 2:38), confessing the name of Christ (Acts 8:37), and being baptized for the remission of one’s sins (Acts 2:38) one has met the grace of God and is now a Christian. The same thing that saves one from his sins also adds one to the body or church of Christ (Acts 2:28, 47).

There are those who become Ichabod by desiring change in God’s plan of salvation. Consider what F. Lagard Smith states the following in his book, *Who Is My Brother?*:

Will there be people among that multitude who have never been baptized for remission of sins? You can count on it! Abraham, Moses, and Elijah—all unbaptized—will be there to meet us. And maybe, God willing, even some among our own family and friends who have never been immersed. Will we be outraged if they are there? Will we be disillusioned with God if they are not there? Will there be souls in heaven who never attended a Church of Christ? No doubt about it. Deborah, Daniel, and David will be telling us stories about how they used to worship God in the days before Christ and his apostles. And maybe even some brothers and sisters in Christ who worshipped down the street from us. Should we snub them because they never associated themselves with us?³

It is true that Abraham, Moses, and Elijah were not baptized for the remission of their sins. The reason is simple! They were not required to do so! They lived under the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensation of time and not under the Christian dispensation. They obeyed God under the time in which they lived. Those under the Christian dispensation of time who are accountable for their actions and have transgressed the Law of God (1 John 3:4) **must** obey the gospel plan of salvation in order to go to Heaven! When we change God’s plan of salvation, then it is Ichabod!

WHEN GOD'S PATTERN OF FELLOWSHIP IS NOT OBEYED, THEN IT IS ICHABOD

God has given us the limits or the boundaries of our fellowship. He has told us that we are to fellowship those who walk in the light (1 John 1:7) and those who are of like precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1). He has also

commanded us to not grant fellowship to those who walk in the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). Brother Robert Taylor wisely wrote:

God does the defining of fellowship and it is his regal right to do so. Jehovah sets the boundaries of Christian fellowship and it is his precious prerogative so to do. He determines whom He will and will not fellowship; he determines whom we are to fellowship and whom we are not to fellowship...God has treated the doctrine of fellowship like he has the doctrine of conversion. He sets the stipulations; he legislates the laws; he conveys the conditions; he defines the demands.⁴

Therefore, God has already set the limits of Christian fellowship. The faithful child of God cannot fellowship those whom God does not fellowship. This would include those involved in antiism, liberalism, denominationalism, and any other -ism that the Bible condemns. Now those who would insist on having fellowship with denominations are in violation of the Scriptures. The agenda of the change agent is to fellowship denominations.

Note some of the statements made by change agents regarding fellowship:

Max Lucado is on record as saying:

“Whenever I see a man call God ‘Father,’ I see a brother.”⁵

He furthers states in his book, *In The Grip Of Grace*:

It should be simple. Where there is faith, repentance, and a new birth, there is a Christian. When I meet a man whose faith is in the cross and whose eyes are on the Savior, I meet a brother. Wasn't that Paul's approach? When he wrote the church in Corinth, he addressed a body of Christians guilty of every sin from abusing the Lord's Supper to arguing over the Holy Spirit. But how does he address them? “I beg you, brother and sisters” (1 Cor. 1:10).⁶

F. LaGard Smith in his book, *Who Is My Brother?* writes:

How can we say that Chuck Swindoll is not a Christian, or that James Dobson is not a brother in Christ? Are we really to believe that God will send C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and John Stott to hell? These men have mentored us, prompted us, and stretched us in our Christian thinking, sometimes even more than our own preachers and writers.⁷

Being mentioned by such men may be what is wrong with many of our brethren today; they have been prompted and stretched in their thinking by denominational preachers instead of studying the pure and unadulterated gospel of Christ! Instead of listening to Paul and Peter they have listened to James Dobson and his Focus on the Family!

The following is an article entitled “From The Pastor” contained on page 2 of the bulletin *In Touch* of the St. Luke’s United Methodist Church; 3717 44th St.; Lubbock, TX 79413; dated December 15, 1999; Volume 1 Number 8:

That They May Be One

Just before Jesus went to the cross He prayed that His disciples in every generation after Him would be brought to complete unity to let the world know that He had been sent by God and that God loved us all just as much as He loved His only begotten Son, Jesus...One of my greatest dreams is when I can see the Church of Jesus Christ acting like Jesus and working together to help the world find a relationship with Jesus. A few weeks ago, St. Luke’s had the honor of helping to be part of the answer to Jesus’ prayer for unity. Something happened that I never thought possible. A pastor from Monterey Church of Christ baptized an infant in our building! A young couple had been married—one of them came from a Lutheran background, the other from the Church of Christ. I want to share with you the letter of thanks we received from Monterey Church of Christ:

To Our Brothers and Sisters at St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, Thank you for allowing us to use your building on November 18th. The families involved were from two different backgrounds and saw a need to unite their faith and family through the sacrament of baptism. Because of your generous spirit, a household has been encouraged to continue their faith tradition. We of the Monterey Church of Christ are grateful to have you as our partners in spreading the good news of Jesus in our community and the world. May God bless your ministry richly.

Folks, that is the Body of Christ acting like Christ. That is what Christmas is all about! Jesus was sent to bring us all together in Him. I am proud to be part of a congregation that is seeking to be the answer to Jesus’ prayer for unity. I am proud to be part of a congregation that is seeking to demonstrate the true spirit of Christmas by helping everyone to focus their lives on Jesus! Have a blessed Christmas season, and may you come to know Jesus more intimately every day so that we may rejoice in all parts of His Body, the Church.

In Christ,

[Handwritten: “Tom”]⁸

Brethren, we cannot participate in joint religious services or interdenominational worship services with denominations and still be in fellowship with God at the same time!

The apostle Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for wanting to broaden the limits of fellowship (notice 1 Corinthians 5). Paul stated, “It

is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1). The brethren there chose to enlarge their boundary of fellowship by fellowshipping this brother in Christ who was guilty of incest! Their standard was broader than God's standard. Paul said that they were glorying in this when they should have been mourning! They were playing the Ichabod! There was no glory at all to be found! Today we find similar attempts by those to enlarge the boundaries of fellowship. Unto them we say the same thing that Paul said, "Your glorying *is not good*" (1 Cor. 5:6).

CONCLUSION

Ichabod's mother realized that the glory was gone from Israel. Many of our brethren today have become disenchanted with the Old Paths and they cry out "Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace" (Jer. 6:14). They do not respect Bible authority and the scriptural desire to only speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where it is silent. The pure gospel of Christ has no appeal to them, and the church is not unique and distinctive anymore to them. They have become Ichabod.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 1992).

³F. Lagard Smith, *Who Is My Brother? Facing A Crisis Of Identity And Fellowship* (Malibu, CA: Cotswold Publishing, 1997), pp. 224-225.

⁴Robert Taylor, *The Bible Doctrine of Christian Fellowship* (Ripley, TN: Taylor Publications, 1980), p. 6.

⁵Ron Wilson, "Pair of preachers planning to swap their pulpits April 2," *Contending For The Faith*, August 1995, p. 7.

⁶Max Lucado, *In The Grip Of Grace* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996) p. 169.

⁷Smith, p. 28.

⁸St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Lubbock, Texas, church bulletin, "From the Pastor," *In Touch*, December 15, 1999, p. 2, taken from LURlist@onelist.com, Digest Number 442, Topic No. 1 by Jerry Brewer, January 04, 2000 (moderated by Gil Yoder and Ron Cosby).

“ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON ABSALOM! WOULD GOD I HAD DIED FOR THEE” 2 SAMUEL 18:33; 19:4

Ronnie Hayes



Ronald Ethbert Hayes was born in Birmingham, Alabama on November 26, 1954. He has attended Freed-Hardeman University, Memphis School of Preaching and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has done full time work in Aubrey, Arkansas; Barn Creek, Alabama; Falkville, Alabama; and is currently working with the Memorial Parkway Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. Ronnie speaks on several lectureships and in several gospel meetings each year. He also works extensively with Indian Creek Youth Camp near Jasper, Alabama.

Ronnie is married to Cynthia (Reeves) Hayes, and they have three children: Leah, Kyle, and Anna.

The theme, “Sad Statements of the Bible,” is one we should examine, recognizing that tragedies can befall any of us. The mournful cry of David for Absalom is a parent’s worse nightmare; it is one which is repeated year after year. Contained within the statement is a two-fold responsibility, the parent’s and the child’s. Let us examine this statement with these thoughts in mind.

BACKGROUND OF THE STATEMENT 2 SAMUEL 18:33

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! (2 Sam. 18:33).¹

To understand how Absalom got into this situation, it is necessary to look at the background. As Paul Harvey would say: “And now the rest of the story!”

In chapter 13, Amnon defiles Tamar, the sister of Absalom. There is a great hatred which develops between Amnon and Absalom (2 Sam. 13:22). Absalom then devises a scheme to kill Amnon, and the servants

of Absalom carry out the plan (2 Sam. 13:28-29). After this, Absalom flees to Talmai, the king of Geshur, and David begins to mourn for Absalom (2 Sam. 13:38-39).

In chapter 14, after a three-year period with Talmai, king of Geshur, Joab recognizes David's mourning after Absalom, and he devises a plan to retrieve Absalom. When Absalom comes back to Jerusalem, there is an additional two years before Absalom sees David's face.

In chapter 15, Absalom steals the hearts of the men of Israel by judging controversial matters. Then he suggests that, if he were *King*, he would handle all such matters with efficiency (2 Sam. 15:3-5). Absalom forms an alliance with Ahithophel, and they conspire to kill David (2 Sam. 15:12). David has to flee the city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:14). Hushai remains behind as a spy and informant for David (2 Sam. 15:32-34).

In chapter 16, David is on the run from Absalom. When matters appear to be to the point that they possibly could not get any worse, Shimei comes out and curses David (2 Sam. 16:5-8). Hushai gains the confidence of Absalom, which will ultimately be used against Absalom (2 Sam. 16:16-19).

In chapter 17, Absalom takes the counsel of Hushai over the counsel of Ahithophel. Ahithophel advises Absalom to pursue a weak and weary David to destroy him (2 Sam. 17:2-3). After receiving the counsel of Ahithophel, Absalom asks for the counsel of Hushai. Hushai says the counsel of Ahithophel is not good (2 Sam. 17:7) and that it would be better for Absalom to amass a large army before pursuing David (2 Sam. 17:8-13). Hushai sends word to David of Absalom's plan (2 Sam. 17:15-16). When Ahithophel sees that his counsel is not followed, he hangs himself (2 Sam. 17:23). Absalom makes Amasa captain of his army (2 Sam. 17:25).

In chapter 18, the battle between the forces of David and the forces of Absalom takes place. David divides his troops into thirds with Joab, Abishai, and Ittai being in charge (2 Sam. 18:2). David has one request of his troops: "*Deal* gently for my sake with the young man, *even* with Absalom" (2 Sam. 18:5). The battle does not go Absalom's way. He has to flee and, in doing so, catches his head in an oak tree (2 Sam. 18:9). Absalom's predicament is reported to Joab, and Joab kills Absalom (2 Sam. 18:10-15). The news is then reported to David, and he mourns

for the loss of his son: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33).

There are many things which can destroy our children. Drugs, drinking, tobacco, the destruction of their morals through entertainment, friends, and even school events are just a few of the dangers of which parents must be aware. Let us see if we can figure out what role the parents should play and how our children should react to the instruction of their parents.

THE HERITAGE OF OUR PARENTS **PROVERBS 22:6**

What a tragedy! Absalom had such a promising future. He could have been a great asset to his father and to the nation but he chose to seek his own interests. As parents, we have a tremendous responsibility to our children. The way that we live, talk, act, and even the things that we do will help mold our children. We have been given children as an heritage from God: "Lo, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is his* reward" (Psa. 127:3). It is our responsibility as parents to give the proper guidance to our children. As parents, we are to teach our children: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deu. 6:7). We are to train our children: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pro. 22:6). We are to provide for our children:

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children (2 Cor. 12:14).

It is also our responsibility to nurture our children: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). As parents we are to love our children: "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children" (Tit. 2:4). It almost seems absurd that many of these things have to be mentioned, but just a look at the evening news demonstrates there is a great need to address the responsibilities of parents.

When we look at the life of David, we can see many mistakes which he made. He started with marital problems. David was a polygamist.

And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron (2 Sam. 3:2-5).

This is not what God wants in a happy marriage (Mat. 19:1-9). When we mess with what God wants, then major problems will arise. Whether we are talking about divorce, polygamy, or just living with someone outside the bonds of marriage, problems are going to arise. Stephen Murray and Randy Smith in their book *Divorce Recovery For Teenagers*, suggest that teens go through “abandonment, abuse, neglect, over-control and dysfunctional modeling”² to just name a few of the problems which arise out of marriage problems. Could it be that the sin which Amnon committed against his half sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:12-14), arose out of the marriage problems of David. If the answer is yes, then the very murder committed by Absalom when he avenged Tamar was directly tied to the sins of David in his marriages. In a world of devastation, maybe we simply need to look at our marriages to see why many of our children are doing what they are doing.

There is no doubt that our children are watching us! The question is: “What are they seeing?” In David, Absalom saw a “man of war.”

For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they *be* mighty men, and they *be* chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father *is* a man of war, and will not lodge with the people (2 Sam. 17:8).

It appears common knowledge that David was a “man of war.” Even God, when David desired to build the house of God, would not allow David to be that man because he was a “man of war.”

Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: *As for me*, I *had* in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou *hast been* a man of war, and hast shed blood (1 Chr. 28:2-3).

In wars, there are always cruelties and atrocities which will make grown men cry and scream out in the dead of the night. Just imagine what this would do for children? Absalom must have heard of and possibly even have seen the cruelties of his father.

And he took their king’s crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was *set* on David’s head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance. And he brought forth the people that *were* therein, and put *them* under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem (2 Sam. 12:30-31).

Do we not wonder what the thought process of Absalom must have been? Was he just a “chip off the old block”? His father was a “man of war.” Did he think: “This must be the way to handle situations, such as Amnon and succession to the throne”? None of us could probably begin to imagine plotting to kill our fathers, but Absalom did not seem to mind; as a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that “the saying pleased Absalom well” (2 Sam. 17:1-4). How could someone sink so low that the killing of their father pleased them well? Could it be he learned these things from a “man of war”?

We can see that David was a man after God’s own heart.

But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee (1 Sam. 13:14).

Samuel was speaking to Saul, telling him the kingdom was going to be taken from him and given to a man after God’s own heart. This man was David. But David was also a “man of sin”! How much impact did lying, adultery, and murder have on the life of Absalom? This was just what David did as he stole Bathsheba from Uriah and ultimately was responsible for having Uriah killed (2 Sam. 11:2-17).

As parents, we cannot go about doing what we want and think that we will not have to suffer the consequences. Jeremiah spoke of Jerusalem following the teachings of their fathers:

And I will make Jerusalem heaps, *and* a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant. Who *is* the wise man, that may understand this? and *who is he* to whom the mouth of the LORD hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land per-

isheth *and* is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through? And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them (Jer. 9:11-14).

What are we teaching our children? When our children imitate us, what are they doing? We are not going to escape the consequences of our sins. “But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23). The next time we lie, steal, or cheat in front of our children, we might want to remember Absalom. What are we creating if we practice a life of sin?

**“A WISE SON TAKETH”
PROVERBS 15:20**

It is unfair to place all of the blame for delinquent children at the doorstep of the parents. There is no doubt, parents play a major role in the life of their children. As parents it is imperative for us to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6). But as an old friend use to say, “Every pot has to sit on its own bottom.” Just because a child receives proper training does not mean that he/she will always be faithful to the truth. In the *Adult Gospel Quarterly* in 1978 we read:

This familiar statement of the wise man is often misapplied. Frequently it is cited to show that if a child is taught right he will always be faithful; but, it is not true that all who have been taught the truth are faithful and that is not what this verse says or teaches. The words, “Train up a child in the way he should go,” translate a phrase in Hebrew which means: initiate a child into a course of life in harmony with his nature his disposition, his inclinations. That is, help him into a manner of life which fits him! This of course is a type of training which leads to a proper way of life and, if consistently followed, will be true in old age. Also, this passage is often misapprehended by those who see in the statement, “and when he is old he will not depart from it,” the meaning that if proper teaching in childhood is done, the one thus taught will be faithful to God in maturity.” But, the passage says, “When he is old...” A person who has been faithful until he reaches the age of eighty is not likely to apostatize and fall away.

Training a child in the way he should go is vastly more than merely teaching him what is right. It involves and necessitates the ability on the part of the child to receive and to assimilate the training. All of us are acquainted with cases where two children of the same family who

received exactly the same teaching went in opposite directions morally and religiously on reaching maturity. Such instances cannot be explained on the ground that the parents failed to teach the one who went wrong. The truth is, some children by nature, by disposition, and by inclination, are able to receive training which will affect their future life, and others are not. Though taught, they are not trained and in those cases the fault is not that of the parents but of the child. It is of course true that parents often fail in their responsibilities toward their children but the mere fact that a child does not keep in the right way is not to be taken as *prima facie* evidence that the parents failed in their efforts. Parents often suffer remorse in such cases when they are not at fault.³

Parents train and children choose. Our children are influenced by many things and must come up with their choices for life. Peer pressure plays a great role in the decisions that many of our children make. Our children are

caught in the midst of change, confusion, challenge, media bombardment, family dysfunction, and a host of other stresses, they yearn for stability and normalcy. In an effort to protect themselves from feeling like they've been left alone to wander through adolescence, our teens will change colors and blend in with the surrounding environment—the peer group.⁴

Peer pressure can be positive or negative. We are warned: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do* evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest *judgment*” (Exo. 23:2). Solomon warned: “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil *men*” (Pro. 4:14). “Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them” (Pro. 24:1). Paul tells us:

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Cor. 5:9-11).

If we do not listen to these warnings, it could cost us deeply and possibly eternally. The evil influence of nations, of which God had warned, caused Solomon to turn his heart from God.

Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you:

for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon
clave unto these in love (1 Kin. 11:2).

Solomon speaks about the results of following evil men. “Whoso keepeth the law *is* a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous *men* shameth his father” (Pro. 28:7). Paul gives his advice about evil companionship. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33).

We live in a world of MTV, ESPN, VH1, Star Wars, Pokemon, and Bart Simpson. The media, especially radio and television, have more influence on some children than anything else in this world. Many children spend more time in front of the television than any other activity.

The average household in America has the television on over seven hours a day. Households with children have the set on for a total of fifty-eight hours and forty-three minutes during the average week. The average American child aged two to five years watches over twenty-seven hours of TV per week. This means that these young children, who are unable to distinguish fact from fantasy, will have spent roughly six thousand hours watching television before they begin formal school. One study conducted in the early eighties offered four- and five-year-olds the choice of giving up television or giving up their fathers. One-third said they would give up Daddy!⁵

It reaches the point that television becomes the god and religion of our children. It is television which will be teaching our children.

Television is serving our children and teens as a sort of religious mentor. At a time when they are forming their spiritual values and beliefs, TV (in true postmodern fashion) encourages them to forget organized religion and the God of the Bible to pursue whatever self-made religious beliefs make sense to them.⁶

Have we listened to the language and watched the perversion which is on the television? Is this what we want our children to be taught? “Through the miracle of TV, our children can witness war, murder, rape, hate, prejudice, sexual promiscuity, and a host of other inappropriate behaviors before they are even allowed to cross the street alone.”⁷

If it is not the TV, then it is the radio which is occupying the minds of our children. Many of our young people will not be able to quote John 3:16, but they know every word to the newest song by the *Back Street Boys* or *NSYNC*. The impact that music has on our children can be heard in their language and seen in the clothes they wear. Many of us will never realize the influence that music has on our children, but the music

industry does. Bruce Springsteen realized when he wrote in his 1985 hit *Born in the U.S.A.*: "We busted out of class; had to get away from those fools. We learned more from a three-minute record; than we ever learned in school."⁸ Jimi Hendrix said, "Atmospheres are going to come through music because music is a spiritual thing of its own, you can hypnotize people with music, and when you get them at their weakest point you can preach into their subconscious whatever you want."⁹ Spencer Dryden said, "Get them while they're young. Bend their minds."¹⁰ John Denver suggested: "Rock music is a greater influence over the souls of men than primitive christianity."¹¹ The message of most modern music is either sexual or rebellious. Our children are in a battle for their souls. They need a level playing surface. They do not need to be poisoned by music which will destroy their sound reasoning.

Even our schools are influencing our children for right and wrong. Since when have our schools become a sanction for what is right and wrong? Many of our children are under the impression that if the school does it, it must be right, such as the Prom, the wearing of immodest clothing for any sporting activity, or even the selling of chances (gambling) to raise money. I have even had parents question whether or not we should question what the school is doing. My answer is: "If you are concerned about your children's souls, you will question whether or not the activity is right or wrong." Let us not leave the souls of our children in the hands of strangers.

There is no doubt that our children are being influenced. The question is: "What can we do to keep them safe from all of these evil influences?" We need to teach them to put their trust in God. David said, "Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies" (Psa. 40:4). David also assures us that our trust in God will not be wasted. "The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate" (Psa. 34:22). We are also told to "trust in him at all times" (Psa. 62:8). "*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes*" (Psa. 118:8-9). If we put our trust in man, we will be disappointed. One of the greatest lessons we can learn is to trust God. What God says, He will do. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all

should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Man may promise something and never deliver, but God has promised and will deliver.

We must also get our children to fulfill their responsibilities. Everyone of us begin the Christian life as a babe in Christ. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). From this infancy, each of us must mature (2 Pet. 1:5-9; 3:18). It is a growth process which involves our studying and learning (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15). As Paul stated, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). When we “grow up,” it is time for us to accept and fulfill our responsibilities. As David was giving charge to Solomon, he said, “I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man” (1 Kin. 2:2). As we grow and mature, there are some responsibilities that we must fulfill or accept. It shows the maturity level in our lives. Some never grow up and accept their responsibilities, which is not good.

Our children must learn to remain within the boundaries established by the Scriptures. Everyone has to have guidelines by which to live. It is imperative for me to learn the boundaries established by God. “Who-soever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). “*Sin* is translated from the Greek *hamartia*; the literal meaning of which is ‘to miss the mark,’ and as here used, to veer away from that which is right.”¹² All of our lives would be much easier if we could only learn to let the Scriptures be our guide. Paul told Timothy:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Christ tells us: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). It is God’s Word that informs us of those things which are sinful. Without the boundaries established by God’s Word, how would we know what is right or wrong? It is God’s Word which establishes what is modest, proper language, proper actions of life, and yes, even whether or not our worship is acceptable unto Him. The sooner we can learn to stay within the boundaries established by God, the easier our lives will be.

One of the most important safeguards our children can learn is always to correct their mistakes. Christ tells us: "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 18:3). When Christ says to "become as little children," He is speaking of an attitude of heart. Children are innocent, forgiving, and desire to be forgiven if they are out of favor of their parents. We should all desire to correct our mistakes when we recognize them. Peter went out and wept bitterly when he heard the cock crow (Mat. 26:75). On the day of Pentecost: "Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). When they realized that they had crucified the Son of God, they were interested in knowing what to do! The Bible tells us that when the prodigal son "came to himself" (Luke 15:17), he was ready to do what it took to correct his mistake. Many will never leave the sin in their life because of pride. They refuse to correct their mistake.

Each of us as parents knows how David felt.

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! (2 Sam. 18:33).

God, grant us the wisdom to train our children properly, and grant our children the wisdom to accept the instructions.

Little Ones and You

There are little eyes upon you,
 And they're watching night and day
 There are little ears that quickly
 Take in every word you say.
 There are little hands all eager
 To do everything you do,
 And a little boy who's dreaming
 Of the day he'll be like you.
 You're the wisest of the wise.
 In his little mind about you
 No suspicions ever rise.
 He believes in you devoutly;
 Holds that all you say and do
 He will say and do in your way
 When he's grown up just like you.
 There's a wide-eyed little fellow

Who believes you're always right,
 And his ears will always be open,
 And he watches day and night.
 You are setting an example
 Everyday in all you do,
 For the little boy who's waiting
 To grow up to be like you.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Stephen Murray and Randy Smith, *Divorce Recovery For Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), pp. 29-30.

³"A Wise Choice," *Adult Gospel Quarterly* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1978), p. 47.

⁴Walt Mueller, *Understanding Today's Youth Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., n.d.), p. 209.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹"Modern Music," *Life*, 3 Oct. 1969, p. 74.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1973), p. 260.

“WHO MADE ISRAEL TO SIN”

1 KINGS 14:16

Howell Bigham



Howell Bigham is married to the former Jackie Calvert of Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Howell and Jackie have two children, Jonathan, age 8, and Hannah, age 4. Howell has been preaching for 14 years, all in North Alabama. He has been with the Hatton Church of Christ in Town Creek, Alabama, since January 1994. Howell is a 1985 graduate of Bellview Preacher Training School, 1990 graduate of the University of North Alabama (B.S.), and a 1999 graduate of Southern Christian University (M.S., *Magna Cum Laude*). He was selected as an “Outstanding Young Man Of America” in 1998. Howell has written four sermon outline books. His twin brother, Harold, also is a gospel preacher.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this lectureship, *Sad Statements Of The Bible*, is one that is so needful in the times in which we live. The lessons to be drawn from the sad statements of the Bible serve as warnings that we might not walk in the way of sin but rather walk in the way of God. The particular sad statement of the Bible, “Who Made Israel To Sin,” revolves around the study of influence.

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

In order to better appreciate this subject, it is necessary for us to return to the soil of ancient Israel many years ago. The Holy Bible records the historical background of Jeroboam’s ascent to the throne over the northern kingdom of Israel in 1 Kings 11:26-12:20. God rent ten tribes of the united kingdom of Israel from Solomon due to his unfaithful behavior (1 Kin. 11:33-34). A prophet by the name of Ahijah used visual aids to inform Jeroboam of his selection by God to be ruler over the northern kingdom. The inspired text states:

And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two *were* alone in the field: And Ahijah caught the new garment that *was* on him, and rent it *in* twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten

pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee (1 Kin. 11:29-31).¹

God said that the whole kingdom would not be taken from Solomon (1 Kin. 11:34). Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was given one tribe, namely Judah, from Jehovah (1 Kin. 11:36). Solomon did not react well to the news of the day. In fact, “Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam” (1 Kin. 11:40). Jeroboam therefore fled into Egypt and remained there until the death of Solomon.

Another interesting episode of Old Testament history is recorded in 1 Kings 12. Jeroboam came with all the congregation of Israel and spoke to Rehoboam about relieving some of the oppression that Solomon had placed upon them. If Rehoboam would agree to this demand, then they would serve him. Rehoboam told them to depart for three days and then come back to him. In the meantime he consulted with, first the old men, and then the younger men. Rehoboam foolishly forsook the advice of the older men who had wisely told him to be a servant to the people and the people would in turn be his servants forever. He accepted the advice of his colleagues, who had told him to make the oppression even more grievous. Israel rebelled against Rehoboam, and he fled to Jerusalem. Jeroboam, now was made king over the nation of Israel. Rehoboam gathered his forces together to fight against the house of Israel for the purpose of restoring the kingdom back to himself. However, he was warned by Shemaiah, the man of God, to return to his house and not to fight against the house of Israel. He was told that this was from the Lord (1 Kin. 12:24).

Jeroboam was presented with golden opportunities to be a good leader. Instead, he threw it all away! In 1 Kings 12:25-33 one can read how that Jeroboam deliberately forgot the promise that God had made to him in 1 Kings 11:38. God had told him that He would bless him and be with him if he would be faithful to God. Jeroboam was more concerned with being a ruler than he was being righteous! He said in his heart:

Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah (1 Kin. 12:26-27).

What ensued was that Jeroboam decided to make two calves of gold to be placed in Dan and Bethel so that the people would not go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to God. In these verses that give a pathetic insight into the character of Jeroboam we learn (1) *the birth of his religion* (v. 26—"And Jeroboam said in his heart"), (2) *the burden that he charged God with* (v. 28—"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem"), (3) *the betrayal* (vv. 28-33).

Jeroboam changed: the *person* of worship from God to idols (v. 28), the *place* of worship from Jerusalem to Dan and Bethel (vv. 28-29), the *priesthood* (made priests from the lowest of the people instead of from the sons of Levi; v. 33), and the *period* of worship (v. 32). Jeroboam's disregard for God's way led Israel to sin. When the devotion of the people should have been to the One who fashioned them, instead the people worshipped the idols that Jeroboam had fashioned. Additional information about this colorful character who "hast cast me [the Lord] behind thy back" (1 Kin. 14:9) is found in 1 Kings 13 - 14 and in 2 Chronicles 10 and 13. Jeroboam, who ruled the northern kingdom for 22 years died as a result of God striking him (2 Chr. 13:20).

THE PERSONALITY WHO MADE ISRAEL TO SIN

The person under the microscope of biblical study is Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. First Kings 14:16 states, "And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and **who made Israel to sin.**" What a tragedy to be known by readers of the Bible in such a pathetic way! Jeroboam certainly goes down in the catalog of biblical personalities who allowed sin to have a heyday with their lives and their names! Jeroboam, known as the one "who made Israel to sin," did not set the proper tone for successive kings to follow. In fact, most of the kings of Israel for the next 200 plus years would march to the beat of Jeroboam and under the flag of rebellion against God. Eighteen kings followed Jeroboam and they all were ungodly men! We can read concerning at least fourteen of them sad statements such as "he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam" (2 Kin. 10:31), "he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (2 Kin. 15:18), and "he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom" (2 Kin. 3:3). Due to Jeroboam and his godless influence, the Israelites were led further into idolatry until they were carried away into Assyrian captivity in 722 or 721 B.C. Notice the chart

that illustrates the continuity of wickedness of the kings of Israel to demonstrate the impact that Jeroboam had on his successors.

Name of King	Length of Reign	Condition
Jeroboam	22 years	Bad
Nadab	2 years	Bad
Baasha	24 years	Bad
Elah	2 years	Bad
Zimri	7 days	Bad
Omri	12 years	Extra Bad
Ahab	22 years	The Worst
Ahaziah	2 years	Bad
Joram	12 years	Bad Mostly
Jehu	28 years	Bad Mostly
Jehoahaz	17 years	Bad
Joash	16 years	Bad
Jeroboam II	41 years	Bad
Zechariah	6 months	Bad
Shallum	1 month	Bad
Menahem	10 years	Bad
Pekahiah	2 years	Bad
Pekah	20 years	Bad
Hoshea	9 years	Bad ²

What kind of man was Jeroboam? Josephus said that he was “a young man of warm temper, and ambitious of greatness and could not be quiet.”³ The Bible gives us a profile of the one “who made Israel to sin.” Many traits of Jeroboam must be present in principle in the lives of Christians today. In searching the Scriptures we find that Jeroboam was a “mighty man of valour” (1 Kin. 11:28). The trait of *courage* must be deeply etched into the character of God’s people today. Paul said, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity” (1 Cor. 16:13-14). Luke wrote regarding the courage of Peter and John: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with

Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Courage is an indispensable ingredient in the makeup of Christians!

Regarding Jeroboam, we learn that he was *industrious* (1 Kin. 11:28). Members of spiritual Israel, the church of Christ, must be industrious. The apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Another trait of Jeroboam that we are able to learn is *commitment*. Jeroboam was committed to change the way of God. He was not content to worship God the way that Jehovah had commanded. He set out and accomplished changing that which was not to be changed under that era. Many, in spiritual Israel, are committed to changing God's ancient landmarks in our time. Many "Jeroboams" are in leadership positions today changing the worship of God! Today, instead of worshipping the God of heaven, some want to worship the altar of drama! Some have determined to engage in joint-worship services with the denominations! Oh, the influence of Jeroboam! God's children must be *committed* to standing in the old paths and walking therein (Jer. 6:16). Jeroboam had so many qualities that he should have used to magnify the name of God. Instead he used them to magnify his own name.

THE PRINCIPAL LESSON FROM JEROBOAM'S LIFE

The main lesson that we learn from the life of Jeroboam is that of influence. Influence can be thought of as that moral or spiritual force, power of capacity by which we have an effect upon a person, condition, or development. Every person has influence! Even babies that have not made their entrance into the world make a profound influence in the lives of their father and mother. The parents, knowing that they will be responsible for the rearing of a child, hopefully are challenged to be godly parents. Influence can either be good or bad depending on how we live. The brethren in Thessalonica are examples of good influence (1 The. 1:8). Solomon stressed the existence of bad influence when he said "one sinner destroyeth much good" (Ecc. 9:18). Jeroboam chose to travel the path of bad influence. In a position where he would have the opportunity to influence thousands, he chose to lead Israel down the road to sin! The following poem emphasizes the fact that everyone has influence.

The lightest breeze that ever blew
 Some slender grass has wavered;
 The smallest life I ever knew

Some other life has flavored.
 We cannot live our lives alone,
 For other lives we touch
 Are either strengthened by our own,
 Or weakened just as much.⁴

PASSAGES THAT STRESS INFLUENCE

The Bible is filled with passages that teach us about influence! The classic text on influence must be Matthew 5:13-16. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

The apostle Paul, in very similar language, wrote, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phi. 2:15). In Romans 14:7 Paul observed, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” Influence is the one word that summarizes 1 Corinthians 15:33! Paul wrote by inspiration: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” Solomon stated, “A *good* name *is* rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Pro. 22:1). One of the favorite chapters in all of the Bible to this writer is Psalms chapter one. The psalmist presents a contrast between the godly and the ungodly in the six verses that compose that psalm. The subject of influence is certainly implied in verse three when the writer penned: “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” The child of God who faithfully serves Jehovah day in and day out will be a fruitful laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. Jesus said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). To bear fruit for the Lord, we must be people of good influence!

In the first epistle that Peter penned, he wrote powerful words concerning the extent of influence that a godly wife can have on her unbelieving husband. He commanded:

Likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation *coupled* with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price (1 Pet. 3:1-4).

These are a few verses that teach us regarding the subject of influence!

PROFILES OF PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE WHO WERE SO INFLUENTIAL

The Bible is filled with example after example of people who exerted a profound influence upon others! Reading the Bible permits us to look into the lives of diverse individuals. Some of these had a good influence on others while some exerted a bad influence on humanity. Let us consider both the good and the bad.

Let us first consider those who had a good influence. Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5), was so influential in the lives of his wife and children. With the warning of a universal flood, Noah sounded forth the need for man to repent! The only ones that would heed the sermons of Noah were Mrs. Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives. A total of eight souls were saved from the destructive waters that cleansed the entire world from the sins of man. How influential was Noah? He saved his family! The Hebrews writer states:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to **the saving of his house**; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7).

While working on this lesson, this writer saw a television ad that said 4 out of 10 children in our nation are living without their fathers in the home. Fathers, where is the good influence that is supposed to be sent forth to help our children? We wonder why adolescents (and even more tragic than that, why pre-adolescents) become involved with things like drugs, cursing, sexual activities, and school shootings. Go back to the Scriptures! Solomon said, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and

when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6). Paul wrote, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Noah left an impressive mark for good on his children!

Job, the faithful patriarch, received a commendation from heaven in Job 1:8. The Scripture teaches, “And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” Just think of the influence that a Job could have in our time!

Joseph indelibly left his mark for the cause of righteousness! He has and continues to influence many to be pure. His statement recorded in Genesis 39:9 certainly is not a sad statement of the Bible! He said, “*There is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Many sermons have been preached on the “Purity of Joseph,” seeking to etch in the minds of our youth the need to remain pure in the sight of God! What an example of good influence!

Another example of one who was so influential for good was David. David, the man after God’s own heart, the second king of Israel in the united kingdom, was a man of war. On one occasion, he was in battle and became so thirsty. He said, “Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which *is* by the gate!” (2 Sam. 23:15). David’s three mighty men risked their own lives to bring water to their king to drink. David would not drink the water but instead poured it out unto the Lord (2 Sam. 23:16). David had been so influential in the lives of these men that they jeopardized their physical well-being to satisfy the thirst of their king! While Jeroboam has the sentence *who made Israel to sin* hanging over his head for all time, David, the second king of the united kingdom of Israel, is known by the label “a man after mine [God’s] own heart,” (Acts 13:22)!

One of the great women of the Bible that “let her light shine” was Dorcas. In Acts 9:36-43, Luke records the miracle of Peter raising Dorcas from the dead. It is said regarding her: “This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (v. 36). When Peter came to the place where Dorcas was, the widows were crying and showing him the coats and garments which Dorcas had made (v. 39). Here was a

Christian lady that was a "first century seamstress." However, of all the garments that she had made, the most beautiful was the Christian coat of good influence!

The apostle Paul surely demonstrated an example of godliness and therefore wielded a powerful influence for good in the lives of so many! He knew the impact that faithful Christians would have in the lives of others. He wrote:

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

Though the influence of these was and is so widespread, there is one that is incomparable in influencing man! His name is Jesus Christ! The late and lamentable Guy N. Woods wrote regarding Jesus:

In so many respects things have changed since Jesus came into the world. His influence, has been, and is, incalculable. As a result of his coming, we have a new system of chronology. His birth has become the watershed of history. Before his advent, the Jews reckoned time from the creation of the world; the Romans, from the more or less legendary founding of the Imperial City on the Palatine Hill by Remus and Romulus; and the Greeks, from the first Olympic game. But now civilized man reckons time from the birth of Christ. Events are now located in time as either B.C. or A.D. —before the coming of Christ or after.⁵

Jesus not only has immeasurably influenced physical things like time. He has more importantly influenced man spiritually. Lives have been totally changed as a result of Jesus the Christ. Remember the Jews on the day of Pentecost? They were guilty of blood-stained hands—hands that had crucified the Son of God (Acts 2:23)! However, by obeying the gospel, they became servants of the One they had crucified. Now, they were saints of God, New Testament Christians, members of the church of Christ! Now, they would be used for the cause of Christ!

During World War II a medical aide was decorated for saving a soldier's life by inserting a barrel of a fountain pen into the place where his windpipe had been severed by shrapnel. In discussing the ingenuity of the aide, the doctors complemented him upon washing the fountain pen barrel with antiseptic before using it. They pointed out that often a very crude instrument can save a life if it is clean.⁶ Likewise, God can take the vilest of sinners, crude in life, and make something useful out of them for

the cause of Christ. Man must be washed in the blood of Christ for him to be useful in the service of the Lord. While Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel “made Israel to sin,” Jesus Christ, the “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15) came to earth to lead us to heaven! Jesus has left us a perfect example to follow after (1 Pet. 2:21). The late and wonderful gospel preacher, brother Joe Gilmore, wrote the following about **The Incomparable Christ**:

He came from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of a woman. He put on humanity that we might put on Divinity. He became the Son of man that we might become sons of God. He came from Heaven where the rivers never freeze, winds never blow, frosts never chill the air, and flowers never fade. They never phone for a doctor, for there no one is ever sick. There are no undertakers and no graveyard, for no one ever dies—no one is ever buried.

He was born contrary to the laws of nature, lived in poverty, reared in obscurity, and only once departed from the boundaries of Israel—in childhood. He had no wealth nor influence, and had neither formal training nor education. His relatives were inconspicuous and uninfluential.

In infancy, He startled a king; in boyhood, He puzzled the doctors; in manhood, He ruled the course of nature. He healed the multitudes without medicine, and made no charge for His services. He never wrote a book, yet not all the libraries of the country could hold the books that could be written about Him.

He never wrote a song, yet He has furnished the theme of more songs than all song writers combined. He never founded a college, yet all the schools together cannot boast of as many students as He has. He never practiced medicine, yet He has healed more broken hearts than doctors have broken bodies.

He never marshaled an army, drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun. Yet no leader ever made more volunteers who have, under His orders, made rebels stack arms or surrender without a shot being fired.

He is the Star of Astronomy, the Rock of Geology, the Lion and the Lamb of Zoology, the Harmonizer of all discords, and the Healer of all diseases. Great men have come and gone, yet He lives on. Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not seduce Him, death could not destroy Him, the grave could not hold Him.

He laid aside His purple robe for a peasant’s gown. He was rich, yet for our sake, He became poor. How poor? Ask Mary! Ask the Wise men! He slept in another’s manger. He cruised the lake in another’s boat. He rode on another’s donkey. He was buried in another’s tomb.

The ever perfect One—He is the Chief among ten thousand. He is altogether lovely.⁷

There have been and are many who seek to blow out the candle of good influence. So many characters of the Bible received notoriety for their evil ways. For example, who would think of naming their daughter "Jezebel"? Jezebel's name is synonymous with evil! The name *Judas* is not on the favorite list of names to be selected by parents for their baby boys. Why? It is because Judas tarnished his name by betraying the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. How many has Judas influenced to betray the Lord? Demas is known for all time as one who forsook Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). What do we remember about Diotrephes? He is known as a man "who loveth to have the preeminence" (3 John 9). These, along with Jeroboam, have subscribed to the catalog of evil influence! How pathetic it is that a person will spend his or her life influencing others in the wrong direction!

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM OUR STUDY

There are many lessons of a practical nature that can be derived from the sad statement regarding Jeroboam "who made Israel to sin." These lessons, if taken to heart, will enrich our lives and make us better servants of God.

First, we learn the *power of influence*. The far reaching impact that Jeroboam had on Israel is a declaration of the power of influence. One man set the direction in which physical Israel would travel for 200 plus years! What about your influence, elders? What about your influence, deacons? What about your influence, preachers? What about your influence, members? Is the congregation of which you are a member stronger or weaker because of you? Are you aiding or hurting the community in which you live by the influence you exert?

Second, we are taught the *position of influence*. Jeroboam was the king over the northern kingdom! He was supposed to be the leader of God's people! Instead of leading them toward God, he led them away from their Maker. We learn that those who are in leadership positions in the spiritual kingdom of God today must realize the vast number of people they can influence. James stated, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (Jam. 3:1). "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the

more” (Luke 12:48). Elders are to be fully aware of the impact that they can have for good or bad for the cause of Christ. Preachers must comprehend the influence that is linked with the work that they do.

Third, we learn the *period of influence*. Jeroboam’s influence for bad was not buried with him in the grave. He influenced kings of Israel for more than two centuries! Likewise, our influence for good or bad will continue even after we are dead and buried. The apostle John wrote:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

The writer of the book of Hebrews stated concerning Abel: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” (Heb. 11:4). Think back to the lives of some in the brotherhood who are now deceased who influenced the church for good. There was N. B. Hardeman, who preached his famous “Tabernacle Sermons” in the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee, in the early part of the 1900s. The influence of this godly man continues to be felt as he labored in the areas of preaching, debating, writing, and educating young minds. There were men like David Lipscomb, H. Leo Boles, B. C. Goodpasture, Guy N. Woods, who faithfully guided the *Gospel Advocate* for many years. They continue to influence men by the way they lived and through their mighty pens. Men like Gus Nichols, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., J. Noel Merideth, W. N. “Bill” Jackson, W. S. Cline, Bobby Duncan, and others who have faithfully proclaimed the gospel, though they are dead, their works do follow them! Influence cannot be buried!

Fourth, there is the *path of influence*. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, “who made Israel to sin” chose a foolish direction for influence. Every person faces a decision regarding his or her influence. Will we, like Jeroboam, choose to influence others to commit sin? On the day of judgment, we will answer to God for the path of our influence!

Fifth, there is the *paradox of influence*. Influence is both personal and public! We all have our own influence, and yet we cannot confine our influence to our own lives! One has written the following:

There’s a sweet old story, translated for men,
But writ in the long ago;

The Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
Of Christ and His mission below.

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do, by the words you say.

Men read what you write, whether faithless or true,
Say! What is the gospel according to you?

'Tis a wonderful story—that gospel of love,
As it shines in the Christ-life divine;
And O, that its truth might be spoken again
In the story of your life and mine!

You are writing each day a letter to men!

Take care that the writing is true.

'Tis the only gospel some men will read—
That gospel according to you.⁸

CONCLUSION

We sing with our children the simple, yet profound song, "This Little Christian Light Of Mine," so the lesson of good influence might be etched within their minds early. Jeroboam let the devil blow out his light for good that he could have done for God's people under the Old Testament, the Israelites. It must be the aim of all to do those things pleasing in the sight of God so our lights will shine around the neighborhood and throughout the world. The question of the hour is simply: "Is your influence good or bad?"

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²H. H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, n.d.), p. 194.

³Herbert Lockyer, *All the Kings and Queens of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, n.d.), p. 150.

⁴Walter B. Knight, *Knight's Master Book of New Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans' Pub. Co., n.d.).

⁵Guy N. Woods, "The Influence of Jesus," *Gospel Advocate* (June 2, 1966).

⁶M. Norvel Young, *Great Preachers of Today* (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, n.d.), p. 191.

⁷Joe Gilmore, "Jesus—Great Example Of Leadership," *Leadership*, ed. Michael Hatcher (Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 1997), pp. 336-337.

⁸Information about poem unavailable.

“DEPARTED WITHOUT BEING DESIRED” 2 CHRONICLES 21:20

Ted J. Clarke



Ted J. Clarke was born in Illinois. He is married to the former Sherrie Mooney, and they have three children and seven grandchildren. Ted has served in local work in Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Alabama, and Arkansas. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1972, has a B.A. degree from Alabama Christian School of Religion, and has done graduate work at ACSR and Harding Graduate School. Ted has conducted meetings in 14 states and has made two mission trips to Jamaica. He speaks on several lectureships, written for brotherhood publications, and participated in several debates. Ted has worked with the congregation in Mammoth Spring, Arkansas since 1991. He has served as editor of the *Fulton County Gospel News* since 1991.

INTRODUCTION

Our “Sad Statements of the Bible” for this lesson could be called *epitaphs*. An *epitaph* is defined as “1: an inscription on a tomb or a grave in memory of the one buried there; [or] 2: a brief statement commemorating or epitomizing a deceased person or something past.”¹ In some of “Ripley’s Believe It Or Not” museums there are sections devoted to unusual sayings on tombstones. I remember a visit to such a place on a vacation we took as a family. There are also internet sites where such items of interest can be found. Some of the epitaphs are humorous, like John Dryden’s: “Here lies my wife: Here let her lie! Now she’s at rest, And so am I.”² On Anna Hopeful’s grave in Enosburg Falls, Vermont, her family put: “Here lies the body of our Anna/Done to death by a banana/It wasn’t the fruit that laid her low/But the skin of the thing that made her go.”³ I do not believe that I could put such an epitaph on the grave of one whom I dearly loved. Some epitaphs warm the heart, such as one from a grandchild: “My Grandpa is not gone/But forever part of me/His hugs, kisses, and laughter/Live on eternally.”⁴ Now that’s an epitaph I could die for! Other epitaphs are sad, as the one on a lonely grave in Oconto, Wisconsin: “Here Lies the Body of a Man

Who Died/Nobody Mourned—Nobody Cried/How He Lived—How He Fared/Nobody Knows—Nobody Cared."⁵ On a skeptic's grave was written: "I was not/I am not/I grieve not."⁶ How bleak and barren the skeptic's self designated epitaph. Some epitaphs are not chosen by those who die, nor by family and friends, but by the way they lived.

This chapter is based on some sad statements that might properly be called *epitaphs*, in the sense that they are comments which "epitomize" the lives of the deceased persons we will discuss. The first is the sad statement which the writer of Chronicles makes regarding the death of Jehoram, king over Judah, that he "departed without being desired" (2 Chr. 21:20).⁷ We shall attempt to demonstrate why that is a sad, but proper, epitaph for Jehoram. As space and time permit, we shall look at another sad statement about another king of Judah named Jehoiakim. Of him, Jeremiah said, "he shall be buried with the burial of an ass" (Jer. 22:19).

What prompted these sad statements in the Bible regarding these two men? What can we learn about them that will keep us from making the same mistakes in our lives, lest others make similarly sad statements about us at our deaths?

JEHORAM'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Biblical history revolving around Jehoram, king of Judah, can be very confusing, because there was also a king Jehoram who reigned in Israel at the same time. Jehoram of Judah was the fifth king of the southern kingdom during the divided kingdom period of Old Testament history. He reigned from 853-841 B.C.,⁸ probably for several years as co-regent with his father, Jehoshaphat. The text of 2 Kings 8:17 says he reigned eight years, which likely refers to his sole rule (cf., 2 Kin. 1:17; 8:16f). The bulk of information about Jehoram of Judah is found in 2 Kings 8:16-24 and 2 Chronicles 21. Jehoram of Israel was the ninth king of the northern kingdom and he reigned from 852-841 B.C.⁹

The parentage of these two Jehorams is also noteworthy. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah for twenty-five years from 873-848 B.C., was the father of Jehoram of Judah (1 Kin. 22:41-50; 2 Chr. 17:1-21:1). Of Jehoshaphat it is said:

And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel (2 Chr. 17:3-4).

In general Jehoshaphat was a good king. On the other hand, the parents of the Jehoram of Israel were Ahab and Jezebel. As king of the northern kingdom

Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him...and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him (1 Kin. 16:30, 33).

Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was a major factor in his works of wickedness and her daughter, Athaliah, led Jehoram of Judah into the same depths of depravity (2 Chr. 21:6). God had Elijah condemn Ahab and Jezebel after they murdered Naboth and stole his vineyard (1 Kin. 21:1-26). While the text says that Ahab sincerely repented before God, and that because of Ahab's humility God did not destroy his family during his lifetime, the evil which Ahab and Jezebel perpetrated continued far beyond their deaths (1 Kin. 21:27-29). A large part of that evil influence was passed on through their daughter Athaliah, whom Jehoshaphat of Judah sought as a bride for his son, Jehoram. (All further references to Jehoram are to Jehoram of Judah, unless specified otherwise.)

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

What was Jehoshaphat thinking when he helped arrange the marriage between his son, Jehoram, and Athaliah, daughter of the wicked Ahab and Jezebel? John Bright, speaking of Ahab's attempts to strengthen the northern kingdom, says:

The next step was alliance with Judah. By early in Ahab's reign, if not before, this was formally arranged by the marriage of Ahab's sister (or daughter) Athaliah to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. There is not the slightest reason to assume, as so many have, that this was not a friendly treaty between equals. The alliance was both military and commercial, for we read subsequently of an attempt to revive the overseas trade out of Ezion-geber (cf. [1 Kin.] 22:48f). Though the attempt failed, the fact that it was made indicates a hope of recapturing the sources of Solomon's wealth.¹⁰

Edersheim suggests that Jehoram was but a lad of 15 or 16 years old when this alliance through marriage was made.¹¹ Power and money have never been good reasons to get married, much less so when one married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel! It is said of Jehoram that "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: **for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife:** and he wrought *that which was* evil in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Chr. 21:6). Athaliah's terrible influence is clearly stated with reference to her son, Ahaziah, who reigned after

Jehoram's death, for "he also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: **for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly**" (2 Chr. 22:2-3). Her devotion to the Canaanite god Baal was a major exhibition of the ungodly influence she exerted over her husband and sons. "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim" (2 Chr. 24:7). She was indeed like her mother Jezebel (cf., 1 Kin. 16:31-32; 19:1-2).

LIKE FATHER, NOT LIKE SON

The thinking and actions which led to arranging the marriage of his son, Jehoram, to Athaliah are unquestionably the worst blots on Jehoshaphat's record, for otherwise he set the right example for his son by walking in the ways and commandments of God (2 Chr. 17:3-4). (See also the section on Jehoshaphat in the Lessons at the end of this chapter). Jehoram's wickedness knew no bounds. One of his first acts as king was to slay his six brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat, plus others called *princes* whom he might have considered as rivals or threats to his stability as king (2 Chr. 21:1-4). The killings also enabled Jehoram to take the money and lands given to his brothers by their father. Was this act of fratricide prompted by Athaliah, or solely of Jehoram's own doing? Later, after the death of her son, king Ahaziah, Athaliah destroyed all the royal seed but Joash, who was hidden by a daughter of Jehoram, who was also a wife of the priest (2 Chr. 22:10-12). One can hardly think of a crime worse than the killing of one's family members for personal profit.

Furthermore, while his grandfather, Asa, and his father, Jehoshaphat, removed the altars of the high places and images to idol gods, Jehoram became the first king of Judah to build places of worship for the pagan god Baal (cf., 2 Chr. 14:1-5; 17:3-6; 21:11). Not only did Jehoram worship these idol gods: "he...caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah *thereto*." The verbs *caused*, *compelled* (2 Chr. 21:11), and *made* (2 Chr. 21:13) imply that "Jehoram not only accepted the religion of Athaliah, but he became a persecutor, compelling the inhabitants of Jerusalem to become apostates."¹²

Jehoram was not a strong military king. Edom, which his father had subjected earlier (2 Chr. 20:22-25), revolted, and Jehoram nearly lost his life trying to defeat them (2 Chr. 21:8-10). Edom's actions may have been the fulfillment of Isaac's prophecy in Genesis 27:40. Likewise, Libnah, a priestly city of refuge (Jos. 21:13), revolted from Jehoram's

control “because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers” (2 Chr. 21:10). Praise God that some in Judah had courage to oppose Jehoram’s ungodly ways.

ELIJAH’S EPISTLE OF DOOM

Out of this background there came a letter of condemnation from the prophet Elijah. This prophet’s ministry was mainly northern Israel (cf., 1 Kin. 17-19, 21; 2 Kin. 1-2), although there are two references of him being in the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kin. 19:3, 8). First Kings 1:17 places Elijah as alive during a part of Jehoram’s reign, but it is common thinking that he was taken up in chapter two, before the events we have been noting (2 Kin. 8 and 2 Chr. 21). However, there are no time constraints on the events in 2 Kings 2:1-12, and it may be that this event is not put in its strict chronological order. Speaking of the parallel work of Elijah and Elisha, one commentator notes:

[I]t is quite possible that he [Elijah] and Elisha functioned alongside each other for a while before his translation (2 Ki. 2:1-12). Letters (cf. 1 Ki. 21:8-10; 2 Ki. 5:5-7; 10:1-7) and written prophecies were also well known (1 Ch. 28:9; 29:29; 2 Ch. 20:34) at this time, and, if Elijah was now unable to travel because of age, he could well have found it easier to communicate in written form. The letter’s contents also reflect Elijah’s conflicts with Ahab’s house.¹³

Elijah’s written rebuke (2 Chr. 21:12-15) included a reminder of the faithfulness of Asa and Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 21:12), condemnation for making Judah and Jerusalem to commit spiritual whoredom and the slayings of his brothers, who, Elijah says, “*were* better than thyself” (2 Chr. 21:13). In retribution, Elijah promised: “with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods” (2 Chr. 21:14). The final stroke will afflict Jehoram with a “great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day” (2 Chr. 21:15).

In bringing these things to pass, the Lord brought the Philistines and the Arabians against Judah, who “carried away all the substance that was found in the king’s house, and his sons also, and his wives,” his entire family except for his youngest son, Jehoahaz (2 Chr. 21:16-17). {Jehoahaz and Ahaziah (2 Chr. 22:1-2) are variants of the same name, involving “a transposition of the component parts of Ahaziah.” In 2 Chr. 22:6 of the King James Version there is a likelihood that a scribal error spelled the name as “Azariah,” but this is “corrected in 15 Hebrew MSS and all of the versions.”}¹⁴

The disease of the bowels that afflicted Jehoram is one of the most painful sort, which continued for two years. While it is not pleasant to discuss such matters, it demonstrates God's awful judgment upon this very wicked man.

While the cause of the disease may have been a malignant tumor of the descending colon or the rectum, the breakdown of the intestinal function suggested by the text could well indicate the presence of bacillary dysentery. Caused by one species or other of the bacillus *Shigella*, it is marked by the usual symptoms of dysentery [diarrhea] but can also exhibit a necrotic inflammation of the mucous membrane of the colon. A separation of dead intestinal tissue and sloughing off of the rectum probably marked the last agonizing moments of this unfortunate king.¹⁵

JEHORAM'S EPITAPH

Jehoram was a man who had many advantages in life. He had an exemplary grandfather and father; he was a firstborn son of a king of the Davidic line and, thus, would reign as king over God's chosen nation in Jerusalem. However, he was evidently too weak to resist the temptations of his own vices and the influences of a wicked wife. Instead of being a servant king, he placed his desires above God's will and was without any concern for the well-being of other people. He lost his fortune, his family, and any possibility of enjoying his final years on earth. Contemplation of the terrible anguish of eternal torment is the only thought that can ameliorate the mental and physical suffering of his last days.

At his death his abused subjects could show without fear the utter contempt they had for him and his ungodly rule and manner of life. The epitaph of his life reads: "**he...departed without being desired**" (2 Chr. 21:20). Other translations read: "He departed **unpraised**" (Tanakh); "He passed away, **to no one's regret**" (NIV); "He passed away **unlamented**" (New Jerusalem Bible). In addition to the fact that no one mourned his passing or had anything good to say about him, his reign as king was considered with such disdain that he was not given burial in the usual manner, but placed apart from the tombs of the kings. This same mark of dishonor was shown for Joash (2 Chr. 24:25) and Ahaz (28:27), but it is not said of either of those kings that they "departed without being desired." Another mark of respect and honor for great men who died was the burning of large bonfires in their memories. While this is not mentioned with regularity, several Scriptures indicate it was a normal procedure (cf., 2 Chr. 16:14; 21:18; Jer. 34:5). However,

the writer of Chronicles wanted his readers to know that there was no such burning for the undesired and unlamented Jehoram.

After noting the violent, oppressive, and immoral life of Jehoram, is it any wonder that the chronicler recorded that he “departed without being desired”?

His life and reign make up one of the saddest and most to be regretted pages of the history of the Davidic dynast...Everything recorded of this man indicates complete religious and moral apostasy, even worse than that of the Baal-worshipping heathen of his time. Apostates usually find themselves in complete reaction against the holy faith and practice of the Biblical religion.¹⁶

Before considering some practical lessons based on Jehoram’s life and the sad statements made about him, let us look at Jehoiakim, another king of Judah, whose life closely parallels Jehoram’s.

JEHOIAKIM’S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Time and space will not permit as thorough a look at Jehoiakim’s background, but there are several likenesses with Jehoram. The direct history of the reign of Jehoiakim is found in 2 Kings 23:34-24:7 and 2 Chronicles 36:4-8 and is sketchy. However, the prophet Jeremiah offers a considerable amount of additional material. One writer assigns Jeremiah 7-9; 10:17-25; 14-17:18; 18-20; 22:13-19; 25-26; 35-36; 45-46:12; 47; and 49 to the reign of Jehoiakim.¹⁷ Jeremiah 1:3 places part of Jeremiah’s work during Jehoiakim’s reign. Some sections of Jeremiah are clearly identified as belonging to that time (Jer. 25-26; 35-36; et al.). Jehoiakim’s reign (609-597 B.C.)¹⁸ was nearly 250 years after Jehoram, at the end of the Assyrian Empire’s dominance and the beginning of Babylon’s world domination.

Like Jehoram, Jehoiakim had a godly father in the person of Josiah (cf., 2 Kin. 22-23). Josiah had instituted sweeping reforms in Judah, including removing the places of worship to idols and restoring the temple and the Passover feast to their rightful place in the worship of the Jews. Of Josiah it was said:

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him (2 Kin. 23:25).

Shortly after Josiah’s death, Pharaoh-nechoh dominated Palestine. He removed Jehoahaz, one of Josiah’s sons, as king (1 Chr. 3:15; also called Shallum, Jer. 22:11), and replaced him with Eliakim, changing his name

to Jehoiakim (2 Kin. 23:31-34). Jehoiakim served as a vassal king, paying tribute to Pharaoh by severely taxing the people (2 Kin. 23:35). Of Jehoiakim it was said, "He did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Kin. 23:37). Jehoiakim skipped over the good reign of 31 years by his father Josiah, back to the evil of his grandfather Ammon and his great-grandfather Manasseh whose combined ungodly reigns totaled 77 years.

Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon soon took away Egypt's power in the area of Palestine (2 Kin. 24:7). When Babylon first came up against Jerusalem (ca. 606 B.C.), it appeared that Nebuchadnezzar would take Jehoiakim captive back to Babylon (2 Chr. 36:6). According to Daniel 1:1-2, this was in Jehoiakim's third year. However, Nebuchadnezzar changed his mind or Jehoiakim's captivity was short lived, for in Jehoiakim's fourth year he was ruling in Jerusalem (Jer. 25:1; 36:1). While there is no notice in Scripture of how or when he died, it is generally understood that he died the year Nebuchadnezzar came back and destroyed Jerusalem (ca. 598/597 B.C.).¹⁹

A WICKED KING VERSUS A RIGHTEOUS PROPHET

While we cannot cover every section pertaining to Jehoiakim in Jeremiah's prophecy, we must notice three that sum up Jehoiakim's ungodly rule. He was warned that his death would not be lamented and that he "shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. 22:18-19). What provoked the Lord to have Jeremiah prophesy this humiliating fate for Jerusalem's king?

First, if Jeremiah 19 refers to Jehoiakim's reign, as most commentators believe, he had managed to plunge Judah into a most abhorrent reversal of all his father sought to accomplish. God, speaking to the kings of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, said:

Behold, I will bring evil [calamity] upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake *it*, neither came *it* into my mind (Jer.19:3-5).

Idolatry and human sacrifice, the things which caused Israel to be carried into Assyrian captivity (2 Kin. 17:1-18), would bring, through Babylon, the same judgment for Judah (Jer. 19:6-15).

Second, Jehoiakim greatly oppressed his people in political blunders, causing them to pay greater taxes than he likely would have had to do if he had been submissive to the powers God placed about him (Jer. 18:6-10). Additionally, Jehoiakim had built himself a large expensive palace during these hard times of taxation and placed heavier burdens upon the people. His palace was built with slave labor. He refused to pay those who built it (Jer. 22:13). Jehoiakim's extravagant spending and cruel dealing with people brought Jeremiah's condemnation, saying, "But thine eyes and thine heart *are* not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do *it*" (Jer. 22:17).

Third, the boldness to sin, which Jehoiakim exhibited, knew no bounds. God told Jeremiah to write in a book all the word that the Lord had spoken against Israel, Judah, and the other nations. Jeremiah called his scribe Baruch to write the words as he spoke them (Jer. 36:1-4). God's intention was that "the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (Jer. 36:3). Jeremiah commanded Baruch to read the words he had recorded in the house of the LORD, with the hope that the sinful Jews "will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great *is* the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people" (Jer. 36:7). When some heard the words of strong denunciation they summoned Baruch to read the book to the princes of Judah: "they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words" (Jer. 36:10-16). Knowing that Jehoiakim had already killed the faithful prophet Urijah and had his body thrown "into the graves of the common people" (Jer. 26:20-23), the princes told Baruch that he and Jeremiah should hide before they read Jeremiah's words to the king. "When Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast *it* into the fire that *was* on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that *was* on the hearth" (Jer. 36:23). Brethren and friends, think of the utter contempt for God and His Word and the arrogance Jehoiakim showed by this action! Yet, the text says of the king and his companions: "They were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither* the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words." However, some of the princes present had pleaded with the king not to burn the roll of God's Word (Jer. 36:24-25).

Jehoiakim then commanded his men to find Baruch and Jeremiah, "but the LORD hid them" (Jer. 36:26). God told Jeremiah to write another roll with the same words on it "and there were added besides unto them many like words" (Jer. 36:27-32). Part of the added words were the promise that: "The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land," that no one from Jehoiakim's seed would sit on David's throne, and that the king's "dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost" (Jer. 36:30).

JEHOIAKIM'S EPITAPH

Although there are no details given as to the time and manner of Jehoiakim's death, one opinion among commentators is that he was either killed in one of the raids by the Chaldean troops sent by Nebuchadnezzar, who were joined by Moabites and Ammonites (2 Kin. 24:2), or that he was assassinated by his own subjects and thrown over the wall to show the willingness of Jerusalem to submit to the rule of Babylon.²⁰

It was not till after the accession of Jehoichin [Jehoiakim's son] that Nebuchadnezzar himself appeared before Jerusalem and besieged it (2 Kings xxiv. 1, 2, and 10). So it is in the highest degree probable that Jehoiakim fell in battle against the Chaldean-Syrian armies before Jerusalem was besieged, and while the armies were advancing against that city; and that he was left unburied outside of Jerusalem.... The absence of direct testimony to the fulfilment of the prophecy before us [Jer. 22:18-19; 36:30] can be no ground for doubting that it was fulfilled, when we consider the great brevity of the notices of the last kings' reigns given by the authors of the books of Kings and Chronicles.²¹

While Jeremiah and all Jerusalem lamented the death of Josiah (2 Chr. 35:25), God told the prophet: "They shall not lament for him [Jehoiakim], *saying*, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory!" (Jer. 22:18). Instead, his epitaph would read: "He shall be **buried with the burial of an ass**, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. 22:19). Being killed in battle outside of Jerusalem, or being killed in the city and thrown outside the city or over the walls, the results were the same. In death Jehoiakim was unlamented and his dead body exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night (Jer. 36:30), as an ass, drug from the city and put on a rubbish heap. What a sad statement for one who was a ruler of God's chosen people.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SAD EPITAPHS

The first and overall lesson to learn is that God's way is always right and best! Remember Israel's cry to God in 1 Samuel 8:4, "Make us a king to judge us **like all the nations**"? God warned them what their kings would be like, even good kings (1 Sam. 8:9-17), warning them: "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day" (1 Sam. 8:18). However, Israel still clamored for a king: "**That we also may be like all the nations**" (1 Sam. 8:19-20). There were few good kings throughout the history of Israel. Even under Solomon, the last king of the united kingdom, idolatry was introduced into Israel through his many wives who "turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kin. 11:1-10). The desire to *be like others* instead of being a faithful people, separated from what is popular is still a curse among God's people today. The "change agents" among us are having a heyday because there are so many in spiritual Israel (the Lord's church) who want to "be like the other religions about us." The kings over God's people were to have a copy of the Law of God with them at all times and to lead the people according to the teaching of that law (Deu. 17:14-20). When the kings ignored God's Word, they and the people apostatized—religiously and morally! We must not permit leaders in the Lord's church to abandon God's Book as our constant and all-sufficient guide (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2, 15; 3:16-17; Jude 3). If elders and preachers in the Lord's church follow after the likeness of the apostate kings and false prophets of the Old Testament, God will judge them severely. We should not wish that anyone die in a lost condition, but like some of the wicked kings of Israel and Judah, how could we lament the death of someone who has abandoned God's Word and is leading people on a path that leads to eternal condemnation?

Second, even though a good king otherwise, Jehoshaphat came under the condemnation of the Lord for *associating* himself with the wicked king Ahab and going to war with him against Syria. When Jehoshaphat returned from the battle, after Ahab was killed:

Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, **Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD?** therefore *is* wrath upon thee from before the LORD (2 Chr. 19:2).

There are some of our brethren today that need to consider passages like this when they join with apostates in the church to carry on some work:

whether seemingly worthy or not. In another endeavor, Jehoshaphat joined forces with Ahaziah, Ahab's wicked son, to increase the shipping income to the northern and southern kingdoms. There may have been some worthwhile benefits to come from this action, such as decreasing the tax burden on the people of Judah, but again God was displeased and said through another prophet: "Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works" (2 Chr. 20:37). It was Jehoshaphat's desire to *buddy up* to the house of Ahab and the apostate northern kingdom that led to the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. What a disaster that was! In that relationship too Jehoshaphat must bear some blame. Christians must be bold enough to be separate from the wicked and those who cast off God's Word. Do passages like 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, Ephesians 5:11, and 2 John 9-11 have no meaning at all for some among us?

Third, we need constantly to remind our young people about the importance of choosing the right mate in order to help one another go to heaven, "as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). If the passages in the previous paragraph apply to general relationships, how much more important is it for a Christian to enter into the most intimate of all relationships with one who shares the same faith in Christ? The very basic roles of husbands and wives toward one another and the nurturing of children will not be carried on as they should if both you and your mate are not one in Christ (cf., Eph. 5:22-33; 6:1-4).

Fourth, despite the consequences which might result, we must be courageous and resist yielding to those who are opposing God. No matter how tempting it may be to enjoy *freedoms* promised and *wider fellowship* with erring brethren and those in denominationalism, we must remain in the old paths, wherein is the good way (Jer. 6:16). We must let those who say, "We will not walk therein," go on without us. Libnah, the city of priests, revolted from Jehoram's rule, "because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers" (2 Chr. 21:10). Standing for the truth cost the prophet Urijah his life (Jer. 26:20-23). Those apostates who are supposed to be God's people have always killed and persecuted God's faithful prophets (Mat. 23:34; 5:10-12; John 15:18-20). Why should we suppose it would be any different with us? We must be as courageous as Elijah when he met Ahab:

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him,
Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled

Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kin. 18:17-18).

We must not be afraid to meet the troublers of the Lord's church, take their insults, and put the truth back to them, like Elijah, John the Baptizer, Christ, and Paul, whether they be kings, elders, preachers, or pseudo-saviors (cf., Mark 6:17-18; Mat. 23; Gal. 2:11; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17; 4:2, 10, 14).

A vast majority in the church may be lost to the present apostasy. The *kings* of the change agents and their subjects may not lament the passing of those who oppose their ungodly teaching and activities. So be it. We will do well to remember that Jesus said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). This author has no malice in saying this, but he believes it is a valid observation; many elders and preachers among us, besides the majority of members in the Lord's church, are so afraid to speak out in defense of the truth of God's Word that they make craven cowards look like brave warriors! Let us understand that it is not important what men write as our epitaph. Let God write my epitaph. Let it be: "Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints" (Psa. 116:15); or, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat. 25:34); or, "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10). At the same time, may God bless each of us to so live in His will that our passing will be mourned by those lives we have touched by letting Christ live in us (Gal. 2:20).

As Mel Blanc, the voice of so many Warner Brothers cartoon characters, had put as an epitaph on his tombstone: "That's All Folks!"²²

ENDNOTES

¹"Epitaph," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, ed. Frederick C. Mish (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993), p. 391.

²Internet site: <http://www.netins.net/showcase/kadinger/epitaphs/friends.htm>.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

⁸John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 56.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981, 3rd edition), pp. 241-242.

¹¹Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 5:60.

¹²S. K. Mosiman and D. F. Payne, "Jehoram," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, rev. 1982), 2:978.

¹³Martin J. Selman, "2 Chronicles," *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 10B:435-436.

¹⁴J. G. G. Norman, "Ahaziah," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, rev. 1979), 1:78.

¹⁵R. K. Harrison, "Diseases," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, rev. 1979), 1:957-958.

¹⁶R. D. Culver, "Jehoram," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975-1976), 3:421-422.

¹⁷N. J. D. White, "Jehoiakim," *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988, reprint of T & T Clark, Edinburgh edition, 1898), 2:558-559.

¹⁸Walton, p. 58.

¹⁹Keep in mind that the differences in years given of the various kings' reigns, both among the Jews and other nations, is an extremely complex issue for which no completely satisfactory solution has been found. There were many times those who became kings were co-regents with their fathers before their sole reigns began. In other instances the accession years for kings were computed in different ways in different kingdoms, sometimes changing within a particular kingdom between kings. While some have done much to aid in understanding these issues, there is no system that settles these differences to everyone's satisfaction. For further study I suggest: Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1983) and Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, revised edition, 1998). These differences do not pose a threat to the inspiration of the Bible, for the Bible has proven itself to be right in countless instances when secular history said that the Bible could not be right. Rather, our inability to understand these different ways of reckoning is likely due to a lack of information on our part, not misinformation in the Scriptures.

²⁰White, p. 559; Bright, p. 327.

²¹C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, "Jeremiah," *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans., David Patrick (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 1:341.

²²"Epitaph," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.

“MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND”

PSALM 41:9

Joel Wheeler



Joel Wheeler, a native of Tuscaloosa Alabama, graduated from Tuscaloosa High School. He attended Freed-Hardeman College from 1970 to 1972 and attended Williams College working towards a World History Degree. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1987.

He has done local work with the Antioch Church of Christ near Tupelo, Mississippi, for three years and the church of Christ in Thayer, Missouri, for seven years. He is presently working with the church in Foley, Alabama. He has held gospel meetings in Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and South Carolina. He has directed young people's campaigns and VBS's in Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. He has made two mission trips to Murmansk, Russia, and St. Culthbert's Mission, Guyana, South America. His local work includes a daily radio program.

Joel is married to the former Susan Midgett of Annapolis, Maryland. They have one married son who teaches at Arkansas State University, one married daughter, and one daughter at home.

INTRODUCTION

God's inspired Word is filled with the hope of eternal life for all of mankind. Yet, also found within the divine Word are sad statements which are made by God, Christ, angels, and men. Sad statements are just that, they are the sad state of the affairs of men. They reveal the thoughts and ideas concerning matters of salvation and man's spiritual condition with God. Many of these statements do not refer to man's physical problems because those are just temporary. Sad statements of the Bible point to a more serious problem in which it deals with man's eternal destination. Truly, sad statements gives us insight to the mind of God in that we know what the righteousness of God expects of man.

Sad statements of the Bible serve a two-fold purpose. First, they reveal the justice and righteousness of God Almighty. The justice of God demands punishment for sins (Rom. 6:23). Paul in his letter to the church at Rome wrote, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on

them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11:22).¹ The Hebrews writer wrote that “every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward” (Heb. 2:2). There is no escaping the justice of God on the day of Judgment. Every person will be accountable for his life on earth.

Second, the sad statements of the Bible keep those who heed on the path of righteousness. What better way to deter sin than to give examples of punishing the wicked who would not listen to God’s Word? Fear of punishment for evil deeds will stop many before they go too far. The problem with the world today is that too many individuals do not believe that God exists—much less that He will render judgment upon the world. Sad statements help believers to stay on the right pathway and use them to light the road of darkness and doubt.

The sad statement of the Bible that has been assigned to this author is “Mine Own Familiar Friend.” In this lesson we will discuss: The Friendship, The Betrayal, and The Consequence of David and Ahithophel, making application to Jesus and Judas.

THE IMMEDIATE APPLICATION: DAVID AND AHITHOPHEL

David wrote, “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up *his* heel against me” (Psa. 41:9). David’s troubles began when he inquired of Bathsheba, called her to his house, committed adultery with her, plotted her husband’s death in war after learning she was with child, and took her for his own wife (2 Sam. 11). David’s conduct truly displeased the Lord (2 Sam. 11:27). God sent Nathan, the prophet, to the house of David at the birth of the child to rebuke him of his sins. Nathan said:

Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife *to be* thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun (2 Sam. 12:9-11).

David clearly admitted that he had sinned in which God spared his life. But God's prophet said, "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that is* born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:14). God had put away David's sin, but the king of Israel still suffered the consequences of his actions. The sword would not depart from the house of David; the infant died, and the king's sons struggled to take control of the kingdom. Absalom, the rebellious son of David, struggled for power, challenging his father for kingship over Israel. He conspired against David even to the point of taking his personal counselor. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba, and many scholars suggest his betrayal was for the sake of revenge.² Whatever reason Ahithophel had for going over to Absalom's side, he struck David to the very core of his soul with the piercing dagger of betrayal when he learned that he was among the conspiracy (2 Sam. 15:12). Ahithophel was David's trusted friend and counselor in which he knew the king's most confidential thoughts. The Word of God says that the counsel of Ahithophel "*was* as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so *was* all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom" (2 Sam. 16:23). He asked for twelve thousand men from Absalom for the purpose of pursuing David and destroying him. But God defeated the counsel of Ahithophel and the plot of Absalom when Hushai was sent by David to spy out the enemy. Absalom listened to the advice of Hushai and did not pursue after the king. David was able to escape from the pursuit of Absalom and safely slip away from his son's army. It was God who defeated the counsel of Ahithophel so David could rule Israel. Samuel records:

And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled *his* ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father (2 Sam. 17:23).

Ahithophel could not cope with his counsel being rejected, and perhaps he realized that God defeated him with his counsel to Absalom. He is the only one mentioned in the Old Testament that committed suicide, except for those who were wounded in battle.

The original language and meaning of Psalm 41:9 is literally that Ahithophel was the man of his peace with whom he had no difference.³ David trusted his friend and counselor with the most intimate and personal information that a king could reveal. He believed that there was no

difference of opinion, nor were they at any time at odds with each other. He was such a close friend and companion to David that he ate bread at his table. This truly shows the personal relationship the king had with his advisor. If any individual was in the position to know the heart of David, it was Ahithophel. David went on to say he "lifted up *his* heel against me" (Psa. 41:9) which literally means that he kicked at him like a wild beast.⁴ The shock of his betrayal surprised David; he compared it to being kicked by a mule. David had several enemies who wanted him dethroned or even dead. The Psalmist often asked the Lord to defeat his enemies, and the Lord did on many occasions. Perhaps the great astonishment came when his trusted counselor and friend turn against him. David's statement concerning Ahithophel was a prophetic look at the betrayed Son of God.

THE PROPHETIC APPLICATION: JESUS AND JUDAS

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He chose twelve men that witnessed His teachings and miracles. The overwhelming evidence that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God could not be denied. John wrote:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

There should have been no doubt in the mind of Judas that Jesus was the Son of God. In fact, Judas was with the other disciples when Jesus asked them what others said concerning Him, and when Peter made that great confession that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God (Mat. 16:16). Judas was an eye-witness to the feeding of the multitudes on two different occasions (Mat. 14, 15). He witnessed the woman that had "an issue of blood" healed by the touch of the Master's garment. He saw Jesus open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. The demons fled the bodies of the afflicted at the command of the Son of God in which Judas witnessed. No one has ever been as privileged as the twelve disciples in which Jesus Himself chose to walk and learn from Him.

On the night before the crucifixion Jesus said, "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" (John 13:18). Judas was not called "mine own familiar friend" as did David concerning Ahithophel. Judas was not the trusted advisor of Jesus nor was he our

Lord's dearest friend. Yet Judas had a personal privilege that only eleven others were able to have. He walked and talked with Jesus on a daily basis for over three years, which means he knew Jesus.

Jesus knew Judas and knew what Judas would do before he did it. Perhaps our Lord would not allow Himself to be as close as He was to Peter or even Lazarus and His two sisters (John 11:5). Our Lord being the Son of God knew that Judas would betray Him before He even chose him. Jesus knew the hearts of the Pharisees (Luke 5:22), and He certainly knew the heart of Judas and knew that he was a thief. Yet we have no record of Jesus ever confronting him with this matter. The name of Judas is engraved in the pages of divine history as the one who betrayed the Son of God. It is amazing how the inspired writers remember Judas Iscariot. Twelve out of the twenty-three times Judas is mentioned, he is mentioned as a traitor or one who betrayed Jesus. He is mentioned as betraying Jesus twice in the Scriptures without calling him by name. Six other times his name is mentioned he is in the very act of betraying our Lord. The inspired writers made sure that Judas was distinguished from the others and they truly separated themselves from him. It must be noted that Judas was a very common name among the Israelites or Jews, but we find that the writers often separated themselves from Judas Iscariot. Judas, the half brother of Jesus (Mat. 13:55) perhaps shortened his name to Jude for the purpose of not getting mixed up with Judas Iscariot. On the night of our Lord's betrayal, John makes a note concerning a question that Judas asked, and he adds in the verse "Judas...not Iscariot" (John 14:22). He writes this to point out that this Judas was not the betrayer. Many would betray a king or a government official, yet it was repulsive to think of some one betraying a religious leader.⁵ No one would in all honesty name their child "Judas" for the simple fact of the reputation that the name carries.

Judas was led to betray Jesus by the deep-seeded desire of covetousness. He carried and handled the money (John 13:29), and he even complained to Jesus when Mary washed the feet with expensive oil (John 12:3-6). Even the Holy Spirit revealed that he did not care for the poor but that he carried the bag and was a thief (John 12:6). He even took the money the others had put in the bag. Judas failed in the area of covetousness. Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he

possesseth" (Luke 12:15). The prophet of old foretold the betrayal and that the price of the Lord was thirty pieces of silver (Zec. 11:12-13). Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a common slave in the days when Jesus walked the earth. Some scholars suggest that Judas betrayed the Lord to avoid the shame of constantly being rebuked.⁶ Others have suggested that three hundred denars had been kept out of the purse in which Judas held because of Mary who washed the feet of Jesus with expensive oil.⁷ However, John the apostle wrote, "And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (John 13:2). John and Matthew both mention that the devil entered into the heart of Judas to betray Him. Judas was filled with covetousness and his desire for money was so great that he would even betray the Son of God. Paul rightly said that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). The love of money drives men to do the most detestable thing. Covetousness is responsible for some individuals to sell their souls to the devil; as Judas certainly did for a mere thirty pieces of silver. It truly was not the Lord who suffered but Judas. Peter states: "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity" (Acts 1:18). Judas purchased his own grave, and even worse, his own eternal destination with the small amount of thirty pieces of silver. It is truly a terrible thing to betray the Son of God and be recorded throughout history as the very one who did so.

Judas brought a mob to take Jesus to the chief priest to be tried. He identified the Savior by the betrayal kiss. Many are not certain why Judas had to mark Jesus with a kiss. Would not the chief priest, scribes, Saducees, and Pharisees recognize Jesus? Did they even know who they were wanting to put to death? The answer is easy. First, it was at night, and Jesus may have been hard to recognize in the dark. Second, by Judas giving the kiss of betrayal, there would be no doubt that he is the very one that betrayed Jesus and made the agreement with the chief priest. Jesus voluntarily stepped forward in the garden when they came for him. Jesus had the power to resist the mob and even stop them in their tracks. After Jesus asked, "Whom seek ye?" and they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth" and He answered, "I am *he*," the entire mob including Judas fell backward to the ground, which shows His power (John 18:4-5). Jesus was betrayed by a friend, one who had walked and communed with Him for over three years. It is said that the betrayal kiss was sharper and more painful than

the nails that pierced His hands and feet. No greater hurt could have been felt than to be betrayed by someone so close. Although Jesus knew what Judas would do, He still felt the anguish of Judas' defection.

JESUS BETRAYED TODAY

Judas is famous for betraying the Son of God, a guilt no one wants to carry in their lives. Yet, so many today betray Jesus. It is as if they drive the nails into the Savior's hands and feet again and again. The apostle wrote:

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:29)?

Every time someone who has obeyed the gospel of Christ, forsakes the Lord and the church, he has simply betrayed Him. Often, too many individuals are drawn away from Christ by worldliness. Paul wrote, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10). The Lord feels the betrayal for the price of the world.

Many among the church today are betraying the Lord by forsaking the Scriptures and selling out to denominations. Paul said, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Some once-faithful preachers of the gospel are seeing which direction the wind is blowing before they speak. Many do not reprove or rebuke with the Scriptures. A congregation in middle Alabama hired a preacher who never preached against sin. His messages were always "positive and up-lifting," but he never rebuked sin. After twenty years of this kind of preaching, one of the deacons left his wife, moved in with an old girl friend, and quit his job. It also turned out that this preacher was a homosexual! He never preached against immorality because he was secretly living it. A question we must ask is: "Did the Lord feel betrayed?" Paul said, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Is the Lord betrayed when we pick and choose what we want to preach?

Is the Lord betrayed when many of the churches have taken the name of Christ off of the sign. Churches in Montgomery, Nashville, Dallas, and other places have decided that the name church of Christ is too radical or carries a bad reputation. They have decided to call themselves "The

Church” or “Community Church.” What a sad state those individuals are in when they become ashamed of the name of Christ. Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16). He certainly was not ashamed of the church, but why are so many ashamed of it today? They are no better than Judas—they have betrayed the church which Jesus died for and purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Jesus said, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). May we never be guilty of betraying our Lord.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²William Smith, *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Professor H. B. Hackett (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1868, reprint 1981), 1:52.

³C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Byron Center, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1970), 1:287.

⁴Smith, 1:52.

⁵Spurgeon, 1:287.

⁶Smith, 2:1500.

⁷*Ibid.*, 2:1501.

“RIVERS OF WATERS RUN DOWN MINE EYES” PSALMS 119:136

Ira Y. Rice, Jr.



Ira Y. Rice, Jr., was born August 3, 1917 at Franklin, Texas. He is the son of Ira Y. Rice Sr., and the former Eula Edna Davis. Baptized at the age of twelve by A. R. Holton, at Norman, Oklahoma, Ira began preaching while yet a boy, in 1932. After ministries at Noble and Paul's Valley, Oklahoma; Edcouch and Mercedes, Texas; Paso Robles, San Rafael, Richmond, and San Francisco, California; and Seattle, Washington, he went, in 1955, to plant the churches of Christ in Singapore, Malaysia, and Southeast Asia, where he spent several years in mission work.

Having now preached for over sixty years, Ira is the Editor of two monthly periodicals, *Contending For The Faith* and *The Far East/ World Evangelism Newsletter*. He is also the author of several books. He is a co-founder and President of Four Seas College of Bible and Missions in Singapore and has served as Chairman of its Board of Directors since 1968. He has been a missionary to the Far East under the oversight of the elders of the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida, since 1978. Ira has preached the Gospel in over sixty countries around the world and recently helped to establish the church of Christ in Latvia.

Of the multitude of sad things in the Bible, perhaps the saddest of all is what King David wrote of his own people in Psalms 119:135. Though he himself had an entirely different attitude toward God's law, the children of Israel had a history of going contrary to it almost from their beginning.

It is distressing to note how often the Jewish people complained at having to obey the Lord. Hardly had Moses started leading them out from under Egyptian bondage than they were rebelling against God. Even when witnessing the lengths to which God had gone to persuade hard-hearted Pharaoh to "let my people go," in their heart of hearts they seemed to be neither grateful for nor even impressed by such things.

The final plague (death throughout the land by the Lord smiting the firstborn of every Egyptian household) ultimately forced Pharaoh to call for Moses and Aaron, saying, "Rise up, *and* get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel" (Exo. 12:31).¹ They did

so; but once they were on their way, Pharaoh changed his mind, sending 600 chariots, horsemen, and a large army pursuing them.

When the children of Israel saw Pharaoh's army headed their way, they forgot all about trusting in the Lord, crying unto Moses, saying:

Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? *Is* not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For *it had been* better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Exo. 14:11-12).

They witnessed God's parting the waters of the Red Sea to let them cross on dry land—also His bringing the waters together again drowning the Egyptian army—yet, hardly had they thus escaped slavery than they were complaining unto Moses once again, saying:

Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, *and* when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger (Exo.16:3).

Never mind that the Lord immediately rained bread from heaven—and continued doing so for the forty years of their wilderness wanderings—still the children of Israel kept on rebelling against God and His law.

The middle chapters of Exodus tell of Moses being called up into the mountain to receive the ten commandments and other laws from God when the camp of Israel reached Mount Sinai. The Record states, "Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights" (Exo. 24:18). Chapter 32 tells of Israel's perfidy, demanding that Aaron make other gods to go before them.

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which *are* in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring *them* unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* unto Aaron. And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made

proclamation, and said, To morrow *is* a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (Exo. 32:1-7).

The Lord was so enraged that His chosen people thus had so quickly turned out of the way that He had commanded them to worship an idol, that He ordered Moses to return to them at once.

In His wrath, the Lord said unto Moses:

I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation (Exo. 32:9- 10).

Moses, however, besought the Lord on behalf of Israel that He turn from His wrath and not consume His people.

When he went down from the mount, as soon as he saw the golden calf and the dancing, Moses' own anger waxed so hot that he cast down and broke the two tables of stone on which God had written the ten commandments. He "took the calf which they had made, and burnt *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder, and strawed *it* upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink *of it*" (Exo. 32:20).

Turning to his brother Aaron, Moses demanded:

What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they *are set* on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break *it* off. So they gave *it* me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf (Exo. 32:21-24).

Oh, the excuses men make for not keeping God's law!

Following the death of Moses, primary leadership of the children of Israel fell to Joshua, the son of Nun. All know the story of how seven heathen nations had to be subdued before the land of Canaan finally could be conquered and divided up among the tribes.

The time eventually came when Joshua, too, "waxed old *and* stricken in age" (Jos. 23:1). The last two chapters of Joshua are remarkable for the telling of his calling all Israel: including their elders, heads, judges, and officers, and saying unto them:

I am old *and* stricken in age: And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God *is* he that hath fought for you. Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you. Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom *to* the right hand or *to* the left; That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear *by them*, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day (Jos. 23:2-8).

Joshua went on to remind them that it was not they who had won all those victories in their own right, but that God had strengthened their hand, enabling one man to chase a thousand so no nation, however great or strong, could stand before them.

He further admonished them to "take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God" (Jos. 23:11). They were not to make marriages with the remnant of those nations that remained among them, going in unto them and vice versa. If they intermarried, then they would know of a certainty that the Lord God would no more drive out any of those nations from before the children of Israel. Those nations would be snares, traps, and scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes until they should perish from off this good land which the Lord their God had given them.

Joshua knew the people of Israel well. Aware of their tendency to forget God and not to keep His law, he called them together not just once, in chapter 23, but again, in chapter 24, reiterating and reemphasizing the very same thing. In the latter chapter, he rehearsed their story all the way back to Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, when their ancestors served other gods. He reminded them of what God had told him to say to them—from Abraham's coming into Canaan, multiplying his seed, giving him Isaac, and, through Isaac, Jacob and Esau. He brought to their attention once again how they had been enslaved in Egypt and God had plagued Egypt until they let His people go. He chronicled how God had brought them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, how the Egyptians pursued after them when they

came to the Red Sea, how they had cried unto the Lord, and how He had delivered them through the sea but drowned the Egyptians. He recited how they had dwelt in the wilderness for many years before reaching Canaan, fighting their way through the Amorites and the Moabites, finally crossing Jordan into Canaan, and how God had given them victory over the men of Jericho, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. He reminded them once again that they had not won these victories on their own, but that God had “sent the hornet before you” (Jos. 24:12), driving out their enemies, giving them a land for which they did not labor, cities which they did not build, and vineyards and oliveyards which they had not planted.

Exhorting Israel to “fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth” (Jos. 24:14), Joshua commanded them to put away their strange gods and, instead, to serve the Lord. If this should seem evil unto them, he said:

Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos.24:15).

When the people remonstrated: “God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods” (Jos. 24:16), Joshua was slow to take them at their word, saying, “If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good” (Jos. 24:20). The people protested, saying, “Nay; but we will serve the LORD” (Jos. 24:21).

Joshua charged the people that they were “witnesses...that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him” (Jos. 24:22). The people said, “*We are witnesses*” (Jos. 24:22).

In view of their declaration, then, Joshua enjoined Israel to “put away, *said he*, the strange gods which *are* among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel” (Jos. 24:23). The people replied: “The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey” (Jos. 24:24).

Rather than leaving it at that, Joshua made a covenant with the people of Israel that day, setting them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. He wrote these words in the book of the law and set a great stone under an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. He said that the stone had heard it all and would be a witness unto them lest they deny their God.

It was only then, having formalized their covenant to serve the Lord, that Joshua let the people depart every man to his own inheritance.

Thus it was that at the age of a hundred and ten Joshua finally died and was buried in the border of his inheritance in Timnathserah, in mount Ephraim. "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel" (Jos. 24:31). This same information, almost word for word, is repeated in Judges 2:7.

After that generation was "gathered unto their fathers," we are informed that

there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth (Jud. 2:10-13).

Just as Joshua had forewarned the children of Israel at Shechem, the Lord God, in his anger, forsook Israel in their perfidy, delivering them into the hands of their enemies so they could no longer stand.

Time after time, all through Judges, we see this same thing happening unto them. They would forsake the Lord, bowing down to other gods; the Lord, in turn, would forsake Israel, allowing them to be overcome by their enemies. After so long a time, Israel would come to themselves, repent, and God would forgive them, causing them to stand once more. But it would not last.

God wanted Israel to serve him under the rule of judges. The time of the judges lasted for nigh onto three centuries, until the days of Samuel.

In his old age, Samuel appointed his sons, Joel and Abiah, judges over Israel (1 Sam. 8). However, his sons did not follow in the ways of Samuel, but took bribes and perverted judgment. This led to all of the elders of Israel coming to Samuel demanding that he appoint a king, rather than judges, to rule over them, like all the nations roundabout.

In his displeasure Samuel prayed unto the Lord; however, the Lord said unto Samuel:

Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done

since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them (1 Sam. 8:7-9).

Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people, describing vividly what they could expect from the king they thought they wanted. Even though he warned them that they later would regret bitterly having a king:

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

In his vexation, the Lord said unto Samuel: “Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king” (1 Sam. 8:22).

Samuel did as the Lord instructed him, making Saul the first king and David the second. David left no doubt as to his own attitude toward the law of the Lord, describing it in graphic detail in the first Psalm as follows:

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Psa. 1:1-6).

With such a beautiful attitude toward God’s Word, is it any wonder that David wept over those who refused to keep the law of the Lord! Rebellion on the part of Israel led them into captivity again and again, so that when Jesus came, His disciples were asking questions like “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

When Israel finally rejected God and His law, the Lord turned His face against them. Once their temporal kingdom was lost, there was no going back to what might have been.

As contrary to God’s law as Israel had been across the centuries, it seems that the Lord would have given up on them entirely. However, when, at long last, God sent His son into the world to redeem the world

and to reconcile sinners unto Himself, Jesus' first concern was for the Jews.

As phrased by the apostle John: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name" (John 1:11-12).

Note those words: "his own received him not." The principal religious leaders of Jesus' time on earth were the scribes and the Pharisees. All through the first four books of the New Testament their resistance to His person and teaching is recorded. Consider this account:

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is a gift*, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. *Ye* hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Mat. 15:1-9).

Later, Jesus mourned over Jerusalem, saying:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Mat. 23:37-38).

Rather than *receiving* Jesus during His earthly ministry, *His own* resisted Him at every turn of the way, finally causing His crucifixion on Calvary.

Nevertheless, He was King; and His coming into the world was to set up the kingdom of heaven. The church is not an earthly kingdom as was Israel; but we are a kingdom, under law, notwithstanding.

When John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, he said, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2). And when Jesus began His earthly ministry, shortly thereafter, He, too, preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 4:17).

After Peter identified Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mat. 16:16), Jesus said, “upon this rock I will build my church...And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 16:18-19).

When Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king, Jesus answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world” (John 18:37). However, He assured Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, saying, “if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

Some argue that, because Jesus’ kingdom is of heaven, it has no law on earth. Numerous passages, however, show otherwise.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2).

And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law (1 Cor. 9:20-21).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jam. 1:25).

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

After the Jews succeeded in having Jesus crucified, three days later He arose again and was seen alive by many over the next forty days. He spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God before being received up into heaven once again.

On Pentecost, a few days thereafter, Peter, standing up with the eleven, preached that magnificent sermon recorded in Acts 2, and concludes by saying, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Since the kingdom and the church are referred to interchangeably in Matthew 16:18—and Peter had been given the *keys* to the kingdom of heaven, when the *church* was established in Acts 2, Peter evidently opened the door to the *kingdom*. Thus Jesus’ reign over His kingdom began at that same time. Those in the church are said to have been translated into the kingdom (Col. 1:13). Christ is reigning now. Paul puts

it: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death" (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

When, at Antioch in Pisidia, the Jews, true to their heritage, contradicted and blasphemed against the things spoken by Paul, Paul and Barnabas

waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

Over the almost twenty centuries since the kingdom of heaven was established, its citizens have departed repeatedly from keeping its law, resulting in the rise of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.

Beginning at the end of the 18th century, a concerted effort was made to restore the church or kingdom to what it was at the beginning—and for the first fifty years with some success. However, by the middle of the 19th century, apostasy set in all over again—and it has been an uphill battle to restore the truth of God's law ever since.

If David were writing today, would he say of the kingdom of heaven, the church, what he said of Israel more than three thousand years ago? Yea, verily. As we look out over the great brotherhood resulting from the Restoration Movement of two centuries ago, rivers of waters would run down his eyes because most of the church, just like Israel, keep not the law of the Lord but seemingly are determined to follow every false way.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

IMPROPER LEADERS

Jeremiah 5:31

Clifford Newell, Jr.



Clifford Newell, Jr., was born and reared in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. He attended the Memphis School of Preaching, Alabama Christian School of Religion (B.A. and M.A.), Kentucky State University (M.P.A.), and is a D.Min. candidate at Southern Christian University. He has taught religious courses at colleges, universities, and schools of preaching. His preaching has involved radio and television programs, lectureships, and mission trips overseas.

Clifford is married to Diane Elaine (King), and they have two children: Joy Wooten and Clifford III, and two grandchildren. He has been preaching for 24 years and is currently working with the East Bristol Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

Truly, this passage in Jeremiah is indeed a sad statement.

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:30-31).¹

In chapter five, Jeremiah discusses the various reasons why God must judge His people. The nation has been guilty of at least six horrendous sins: moral corruption (vv. 1-6), sexual impurity (vv. 7-9), treacherous unbelief (vv. 10-18), religious apostasy (vv. 19-24), social injustice (vv. 25-29), and intentional deception (vv. 30-31). Our study involves the matter of intentional deception.

BACKGROUND OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, was reared in Anathoth, a priestly village northeast of Jerusalem. He was a young man, but he had a rare sensitivity to the magnitude and consequence of sin. He was called to the prophetic office about 626 B.C., and was arrested, mistreated, and threatened throughout his career. His demeanor was timid, but God used him mightily. There is without doubt no other character in all the Old Testament who comes so near us in a human way as does Jeremiah. He had

all the powerful utterances of Hosea and at times could land blows as heavy as Isaiah's, but at the same time his heart was overflowing with a human feeling for the misery of his people, and he weeps or laments sincerely over the fall of his homeland. Jehoiakim reigned as king and revived the idolatry and cruelty that Josiah sought to destroy. The deeply entrenched corruption was only eating away as a cancer at the very life of the nation. "The sin of Judah *is* written with a pen of iron, *and* with the point of a diamond: *it is* graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars" (Jer. 17:1). Deceit, idolatry, and injustice were rampant.

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof?...And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart (Jer. 5:30-31; 18:12).

One might have thought that the dreadful conditions of that time would demand a strong, hard hearted, stern, steel-faced man, but God's thoughts are not ours, and for His purposes He chose a sensitive youth (Jer. 1:6). He put the treasure in an earthen vessel, that the power might be of God (2 Cor. 4:7).

A WONDERFUL AND HORRIBLE THING INDEED

That which is commonplace among men is often shocking in the eyes of God. As the Lord evaluated the religious situation in Judah, He regarded what was taking place as astonishing and horrible. Jeremiah approached this situation with the tone of amazement. The fact that he has searched through the city reveals a deplorable condition. Not only the political rulers, but the spiritual rulers as well were utterly corrupt. *Wonderful* means "to be astonished."² *Horrible* gives emphasis to the deplorable nature of the situation at hand. Immediately, Jeremiah identified and described the shocking condition. The prophets prophesying falsely is to be noticed carefully.

The prophets were prophesying falsehoods, promising the people that God was on their side and no ill would befall their nation. They peddled a false security based on empty forms and rituals. It was a superficial religion, a religion which did not get in the way of one's everyday life.

Truly, one of the greatest passages in all the Old Testament, regarding the prophets as a class of people and their origin, mission, and function,

is Deuteronomy 18. In verses 9-22 the Israelites were warned against the abominable practices of the heathen nations, which practices they were certain to encounter on entering the promised land. The Israelites were charged not to resort unto enchanter, or sorcerer, or charmer, or consulter of familiar spirits, or wizards through whom the heathens endeavored to know and/or control the future. Moses warned that to do so would be an abomination unto Jehovah God. Moses promised instead that:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well *spoken that* which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him (Deu. 18:15-18).

At this point, emphasis should be placed upon the fact that God would put His words in the prophet's mouth, and that the prophet would speak unto all the people all that God commanded.

The meaning of *prophet* presents difficulties; however the use of the word in the Scriptures makes clear the meaning. Milligan defines the word: "To boil up like a fountain (Hebrew). A prophet is one who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit speaks the words and the thoughts of God, whether they relate to the past, to the present, or to the future."³ "According to the uniform teaching of the Bible, the prophet is a speaker of, or for, God. His words are not the production of his own spirit, but come from a higher source."⁴ The meaning of the word is more satisfactorily learned from its usage in Scripture. It is stated in Exodus that Aaron was to be "Moses' prophet" (Exo. 7:1). It is stated that he should be "thy spokesman...a mouth" (Exo. 4:16). The Hebrew prophet was an ambassador sent to make known the will and purpose of Jehovah God to the chosen people (Amos 3:7-8). As such, he spoke for God, and was therefore, both a forthteller (present) and a foreteller (future). Thus, a prophet was a mediator by speech between God and man. A concluding observation is that there are two classes of preachers: the faithful were those who have something to say; the unfaithful feel they have to say something. But there is yet another and higher class. It consists of those

who both have something to say and who have to say it. Such were the prophets of God!

The case is, that when the prophets prophesy falsely there will be sadness, for they are the very ones who are to call men to the truth; however, they are leading them in error. The false prophets did not consider their labor to be error, but God said that it was. They were in a position of leadership, but which direction were they leading the people of God? Jeremiah declared the “Condemnation of False Prophets” (Jer. 23:9-40). First, he called attention to the menace of the false prophets (Jer. 23:9-15). They were professing themselves to be spokesmen for God; however, they were in effect putting God’s stamp of approval upon the most terrible deeds. They themselves were immoral and unscrupulous, and through their false prophecies they strengthened the hands of those who engaged in evil practices. From the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness had spread throughout the land. Faithful prophets were not having much of an impact upon the people, but let reports of evil conduct on the part of spiritual leaders spread throughout the land, and every sinner would use it as an excuse to commit even greater evils. These prophets who preached such a disastrous message and set such a terrible example would be forced to partake of the wormwood and the gall, which symbolizes divine judgment.

In the second place, Jeremiah declares “the message of the false prophets” (Jer. 23:16-22). Jeremiah emphasizes the point that the message of the false prophets is diametrically opposed to true revelation. God had not sent these prophets, yet they eagerly ran to assume their prophetic office. God had not spoken to them, yet they had the audacity to prophesy in His name. Another proof that these men were deceivers is that Jeremiah points out that their preaching was not designed to effect any moral change. Their message had no rebuke for sin and no appeal for reformation. Therefore, these men cannot be faithful prophets of the Lord!

In the third place, Jeremiah mentions “the methods of the false prophets” (Jer. 23:23-32). Three times God declares that He is against the false prophets. His opposition to them is threefold. (1) They have stolen the words of God from their neighbors (probably by scrutinizing the sermons of Jeremiah). (2) They used the official prophetic formulas to give their utterances the aroma of truth. They used *oracle*, a technical

term used by a prophet whenever God put words in his mouth. (3) God opposes these prophets because they were causing the people to err. The people of Judah believed the lying dreams related to them by the false prophets. How presumptuous, how arrogant, how boastful of these men to claim to speak the Word of God when in fact they had nothing more to proclaim than their own wishful thinking.

In the fourth place, Jeremiah points out “the mockery of the false prophets” (Jer. 23:33-40). After issuing his warning concerning the use of *burden*, Jeremiah turns to the false prophets and challenges them with a question: “What message do you have from the Lord?” If in their reply these deceptive deceivers use the forbidden term *burden*, Jeremiah is to pronounce sentence over them. God will utterly forget them and remove them from His presence. The scoffers and deceivers who made a reproach out of the Word of God would themselves become an object of shame and reproach. There is little doubt that this departure was gradual and over a period of time. That is the deceptive nature of sin that was being practiced.

In regards to the priests the text states, “The priests bear rule by their means,” which is to be connected with the work of the false prophets. “A priest is one who is duly authorized to minister in sacred things, particularly to offer sacrifices at the altar, and who acts as mediator between men and God.”⁵ The prophets were to represent God to men, and the priests were to represent men to God. They were to work and cooperate together in the leadership of God’s people. The prophets were to bear the Word/burden of Jehovah to man, and the priests were to minister the offerings and sacrifices of man to Jehovah God. “Bear rule by their means” must be connected with the work of the false prophets. The idea being to “rule by their own guidance.” They reinforce everything that the prophets say. The priests should have emphasized a holy life, and the prophets repentance from error, but because they both were blinded to the truth, they joined together to deceive the people. The corruption of these spiritual leaders is shocking indeed.

The people had the right to expect greater things from these leaders. James addressed this matter when he stated, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jam. 3:1). This idea behind “be not many masters” is “stop becoming many teachers.” This prohibition is to be closely construed with the theme of

chapter 2 and 3. Words are worthless without acts; faith apart from works is dead; blessings are to be bestowed upon those who hear and do, and not upon those who hear and do not.⁶ The influence which teachers exercise upon their students is often immeasurable, and the impressions which they make on the impressionable minds of their pupils, either for good or ill, are far-reaching in scope. The apostle Paul taught: "Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tim. 1:7). The need arose for Paul to go into Macedonia, but Ephesus was a hot-bed of heretical coals; therefore, he left Timothy in Ephesus "that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). Timothy bore a tremendous responsibility in faithfully teaching and leading the church in Ephesus within the strait and narrow way (Mat. 7:13-14). Paul further set forth pastors as having the responsibility of "teaching" and "take care of the church of God" (1 Tim. 3:2, 5). This is but another occasion of spiritual leaders bearing an obligation and responsibility of influence. In each of the cases cited above, people have the right to expect that those in leadership positions be faithful and discharge their responsibility in a scriptural manner. "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Tit. 2:15). In gospel preaching, the speaker has authority to bind and hold the recipients accountable to the teaching of God. Good people, can we see the responsibility of spiritual leadership here?

It is a sad day when the prophets prophesy falsely. It is a sad time when the priests bear rule by their own means. And friends, it is sad indeed when "my people love to have it so." The corruption of the spiritual leaders is shocking, yet the text continues. The ones who were being led astray were just as guilty as those who were doing the leading. The practice of deception had broken down the truth so that it could not be distinct from that which is not true.

THE QUESTION IT GIVES RISE TO

But what will all of these men do at the end when they ultimately face the God of judgment and truth? Friends, this is the greatest question in the entire chapter. *End* means "the ultimate issue of a course of action." It is imperative that one considers the consequences of a belief or practice before accepting it. There is a matter of accountability. Throughout all God's teaching, in every age gone by, He has sought to impress the

human family with the fact that it stands above the animals of the earth; there is something about man that links him to divinity, that gives him dominion over all things created. God has given to him a sacred charge and trust. He has left him free to think and to act, and at the close of His earthly career the Lord expects him to bring a full report and receive according to the things done while here upon the earth he dwells. Throughout the various ages and dispensations there has been no exception to that general principle. Friend, what have you done? We must stand or fall in the presence of God Almighty at the last great day upon our own record, our own obedience to the will of God. Therefore, it all depends upon whether or not we personally and individually accept the obligation resting upon us to meet duty's demands, respond to the call, and walk faithfully in His footsteps until our work on earth is done. Consider Romans 2:6, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Philippians 2:10-11.

But the people were as guilty as their religious leaders for they encouraged and supported them. Falsehood is generally far more pleasant to the ear than truth, and the men of Judah were quite anxious to hear the assurance of peace and prosperity.

The prophets and priests promoted a religion of "do your own thing," and the nation loved it. Why is this a sad statement? To what extent are people today cleaving to that which is evil, and abhorring that which is good? Jeremiah cried because he knew what the consequences would be. The ends of sin and salvation must be emphasized that men might be motivated to abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good.

Jeremiah was both prophet and priest, and he criticized those who held both offices.

AN APPLICATION

It is truly a sad statement as found in Jeremiah's times, but it is perhaps even sadder when we apply it to today's situation. There is always a need for strong, committed leadership in the church, but this need is greatly intensified during times of crisis. One cannot doubt that the church of Christ today is passing through one of the most crucial and critical periods of its history. We have seen a tremendous shift of emphasis over the past twenty-five years, as our thrust was evangelism within the world, however, today our emphasis unfortunately is inward as we attempt to deal with false teachers and their doctrines. We do not deal with these false issues (within the brotherhood) as a matter of enjoyment

or of choice. This course of action is forced upon us because we cannot ignore it when these false ones eat away at the foundation of our faith. This has been the agenda of certain false teachers for some time; for example, the change agents have been seeking to slowly break up the foundation of the church. They have contended that all one has to believe is in God, without any desire to obey Him. They declare we are too dogmatic when we contend for one church—that is exclusionary. The Christian must respond as the Psalmist declared, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psa. 11:3). We must “prove all things” and “hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21).

When the demand for genuine leadership is at its greatest, it seems the supply is at its lowest. Times are harder, decisions are more difficult, and the requirements for leadership are far more exacting. It requires courage in these days to step forward and to accept the mantle of leadership. In times such as these, one can expect criticism, censure, loss of friendships, stress, strain, and incredible pressures upon self and upon family. But at the same time, one may find honor, respect, appreciation, gratitude, and heartfelt love from discerning brethren, along with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that a job had to be done and one undertook to do it. Paul once admonished Timothy to “endure afflictions” (2 Tim. 4:5) and to remember that “we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God” (1 Tim. 4:10). Indeed, he said, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

In this writer’s estimation these leaders lacked five key ingredients. The first key ingredient or characteristic is they were to have *commitment*. The prophets and priests were to be men who loved God and His Word. They were given specific instructions as to their functioning. They understood what they were to do, and they understood how they were to bear their mission. Their reputation for spirituality should have taken precedence over any personal gain they would have received. With regards to leaders today, they have to be committed to a love of the Lord, a love for His church, and a love for His Word. Leaders today have a reputation as well!

The second ingredient or characteristic is they must recognize that they were *teachers* or *instructors*. The prophets and priests were to work closely together in performing their duties: the prophets represented God to man, and the priests represented man to God. There would naturally

be involved the aspect of teaching. When making the application to leaders today, there must be the understanding that they are teachers (1 Tim. 3:2). There is the responsibility “that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9). As teachers and correctors of those in error, the church would be in a much better position in facing the problems that confront her. For leaders to be effective teachers they need to surround themselves with good books,⁷ journals, and study materials, so that they both know the Scriptures and recognize departures from the truth.

The third key ingredient or characteristic is that they were to be *examples*. When one reads the Old Testament, it will be observed that there was a school of the prophets; no doubt respect for Jehovah and His Word were emphasized as well as the character of the prophet. If people of any age perceive that the one they are to follow is not what he ought to be, there will be serious consequences therefrom. This is perhaps one of the greatest dangers that we face. No one seems to be taking those in authority seriously. Luke wrote “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). In regards to elders, they are to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4). To be a proper example one must lead the way for others to follow. This is why Paul stated, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). This leadership must be from taking an active part in all phases of the work that others may see and follow.

The fourth key ingredient or characteristic is they were to be *watchmen*. Watchmen watch for the souls of those who are under their care. God told Ezekiel, “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Eze. 3:17). Elders watch for the souls of those who are under their care (Heb. 13:17). There is a sense in which every Christian is a watchman and cares for those who are drifting away and lost.

The fifth key ingredient or characteristic is they were to be *courageous*. From the morning hours of time there have been those who will deceive and destroy. It takes courage, but we must do as did Paul when he said to the Judaizing teachers:

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection,

no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:4-5).

Leaders must understand that “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers...Whose mouths must be stopped” (Tit. 1:9-11). This requires leaders to have a backbone. They must be able to withstand the wiles of the devil and the forces of error. They must be willing to take a stand upon matters of principle even when it becomes unpopular.

The prophets prophesied falsely, the priests bear rule by their own means, and my people love to have it so. There was no conviction regarding the prophets and priests as to right and wrong, nor to any absolutes, and my (God’s) people have grown accustomed or adjusted to accepting this as the norm.

CONCLUSION

Good people, we not only have a right to, but also an obligation to hold leaders to a high standard. This is certainly not a time to grow weary. It is not a time to lose the care and concern for people or things. Let us demand that leaders step up and be God’s man. And let us encourage them as they lead about the family of God in this new millennium.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²James E. Smith, *Jeremiah And Lamentations* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1972), p. 207.

³Robert Milligan, *The Scheme Of Redemption* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), p. 298.

⁴C. von Orelli, “Prophecy—Prophets,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), 4:2459.

⁵William G. Moorhead, “Priest,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 4:2439.

⁶Guy N. Woods, *The Epistle Of James* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), p. 154.

⁷*Leadership*, ed. Michael Hatcher (Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 1997).

“NEITHER COULD THEY BLUSH”

JEREMIAH 6:15

David B. Jones



David B. Jones is the evangelist for the church of Christ in Nesbit, Mississippi. David graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1986. David is married to the former Kathy Louise Williams, and have two children (Shelly Cates and Wayne Jones) and two grandchildren. Shelly is married to Daniel who is the local preacher for the church of Christ in Independence, Mississippi. Wayne is married to Shana Kaye and preaches for the Glendale Church of Christ, Newbern, Tennessee. David has done local work in Cleveland, Mississippi, Henry, and Middleton, Tennessee. He and Kathy have been at Nesbit since August 1990. David edits *Standing in the Gap*, the weekly publication from Nesbit. He directs the second session at Sardis

Lake Christian Camp. David has preached the gospel over the radio and television along with making nine mission trips to Russia and has also participated in campaigns in the states.

The theme for this year’s lectureship, *Sad Statements Of The Bible*, is certainly an interesting one indeed. As we ponder the theme we note that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).¹

There are many proofs of the foregoing statement including: (1) predictive prophecy, (2) genuineness, (3) authenticity, and (4) the fact the Bible does not cover over the deeds of man, but rather, tells both the good and bad. The fact the Bible tells the bad necessitates the recording of sad statements. Any time man deviates from the pattern of his loving God it is a sad day indeed. The Bible records many times when man decided to do things his own way, thereby digressing from God’s plan.

NEITHER COULD THEY BLUSH IN JEREMIAH’S DAY

One such occasion is recorded for us in Jeremiah chapter eight. Notice the sad statement made against the children of Israel:

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD (Jer. 8:12).

The children of Israel were worshipping the idols of the land, a direct departure from their God. The idolatrous worship brought with it abominations before God. God had spoken to their ancestors toward this end:

When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt *yourselves*, and make a graven image, *or* the likeness of any *thing*, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong *your* days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (Deu. 4:25-28).

It was sad enough that they worshiped the idols, but even sadder that they felt no remorse or regret. Because they were not ashamed, they would not repent. Because they would not repent, God was going to bring judgment against them.

The children of Israel were going to go into Babylonian captivity because they had departed from God. God was going to use the Babylonians to punish the Israelites. God had warned the Israelites repeatedly before they even entered the promised land about departing from Him:

If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, *even* great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance...And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, *even* wood and stone (Deu. 28:58-59, 64).

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites departed from God, resulting in God's raising up of the Judges to deliver His people. Israel was united under the kingships of Saul, David, and Solomon. However, Solomon's departures caused the kingdom to be rent (1 Kin. 11:11). Assyria took the ten northern tribes away into captivity in 721 B.C. Judah did not learn

from her older sister, but continued to depart from God's way until God's cup of patience had filled and overflowed. God had decreed that Babylon would be used by Him to punish His children. Jeremiah tried to warn God's people, but to no avail.

Jeremiah describes the extent of the violence to come against Judah for her sins as he writes:

At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves (Jer. 8:1).

The Babylonians will come against them with such a vengeance that they will open the graves and bring forth the bones therein. Brother Robert Taylor, Jr., writes that this might have had a two-fold purpose:

Perhaps the covetous Chaldeans, the greedy Babylonians, had a two-fold purpose in such. (1) People of affluence were often buried with items of wealth and insignias of royalty. Hence, greed and avarice were major motivations of this. (2) Resting places of the dead were held sacred by the ancients. To rip open graves long covered and sepulchres long sealed for strewing bodily remains for sun and moon to shine on them showed the deepest disrespect and the cruelest of contempt.²

Jeremiah points out in verse three that the devastation and destruction will be so severe that those escaping will wish they had died.

Beginning in verse four, Jeremiah explains to them why this punishment is coming. Judah did not have enough sense to return to God while they had time. Jeremiah describes theirs as a perpetual backsliding in verse five. Their addiction to sin is aptly and graphically described with the illustration of a horse rushing into battle as recorded in verse six. Once a horse gets his nostrils in the wind and decides to rush headlong, there is no turning him. The Israelites were like this when it came to rushing away from God. They had their heads and hearts in the wind of worldliness and they would not be turned back to God. Even the threat of destruction did not appeal to their consciences. They had departed the Word of God, and there was nothing which would turn them around. The Lord points out to them that even migratory birds know how to determine when to leave and go to another environment, but His people cannot see their surroundings as well as the birds. God's people could not discern the fact His judgment was about to come upon them with a great devastation. Their wisdom seemed wiser to them than did God's wisdom.

Jeremiah's comment on this is that the scribe's pen has been in vain. It was in vain because they expounded falsehoods instead of God's Law. They wanted to follow the vain things of the world, and so they continued in their sin. Men will try anything to get their own way, including re-writing the Law of God to suit man's own fancy. The Proverbs writer recorded: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). When man rejects God's Word, there is no wisdom in them. Those in Jeremiah's day had access to the Law of God, and they rejected it. Because they rejected His Law, God was going to reject them.

When man rejects God's Word, his whole being starts on the spiral staircase leading down to the pits of hell. One step at a time, man goes farther and farther away. Every aspect of his life begins to mirror the world, and the reflection of God grows dimmer and dimmer. Jeremiah continued to show them why they were going to be punished. He continued to reveal to them their digression, step by step. The Israelites grew to be covetous because they grew to be more and more like the world and the nations round about them. Even from the least to the greatest covetousness abounded. When one's mind begins to turn toward selfishness, falsehoods begin to abound. Jeremiah comments on this digression:

Therefore will I give their wives unto others, *and* their fields to them that shall inherit *them*: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely (Jer. 8:10).

Selfishness causes a person to deal with other people dishonestly, looking for the gain for self, which is exactly what happened in Jeremiah's day. Even from the prophet to the priest, everyone was given over to covetousness. This caused everyone to look out for self and not to be concerned about the other person. Sadly, first and foremost, it caused them to forget God. Generation by generation their hearts had been hardened and calloused over by the deceitfulness of sin to such a point they had no conscience about right and wrong. Their spiritual eyes had been blinded by the Wicked One and now they could not see God. They could not see their sin because they had darkened their hearts and blinded their spiritual eyes with sin and error. The prophets and priests, operating for Satan, lied to the people. In so doing they caused the Devil to be able to slightly *heal* the people: "For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace" (Jer. 8:11).

There was *pseudo-peace* due to their error, but there was no real peace with God. True peace with God is based on truth and obedience to that truth. Pseudo-peace is based on man's wisdom and man's acceptance of himself based on that *wisdom*. Spiritually speaking, they were not healed before God, but in their minds they had *smoothed over* their consciences by speaking falsehoods.

Because their consciences were now calloused over or seared, they felt no shame for their sins and iniquities. When man leaves the Word of God, his heart will become hardened, and his ability to feel the sting and severity of sin will be culminated. The Israelites had reached this point, and so the sad statement is made:

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD (Jer. 8:12).

When they worshiped their idols and committed their immoral acts before God: were they ashamed? No, they were not at all ashamed because now they reasoned with worldly hearts. Their beings were ruled with covetous consciences, and they felt no remorse for their departures. Satan had calculated his moves to such a degree, he had moved them from God, and they made no effort to fight against the move. They now lived according to the prince of the power of the air and no longer listened to God. Satan had even corrupted the prophets and priests with his devilish doctrines, and they no longer convicted the people with the Word of God. They spoke only smooth words which soothed the hearts of the people and tickled their ears.

The Word of God instills within mankind the morals God desires they possess. The absence of the Word of God necessitates an absence of morality from society. The ability for one to blush indicates a sense of morality which pleases God. If one can blush, he has his heart trained according to God's sense of morality. The Israelites could no longer blush which meant they had digressed from God's standard to the standard of Satan. God wanted them to be able to blush because it would have meant they still had a sense of shame about sinful things. James writes, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (Jam. 3:17). When the doctrine is pure, there will be

peace with God; when the doctrine is corrupted, there will be impurity and hypocrisy.

Because they could no longer blush, they hated the one who tried to reason with them. Jeremiah was a man who had to endure a great deal of persecution because the people did not want to hear about their sin. No doubt, they viewed his type of preaching as *negative* and *legalistic* because he emphasized the fact they had to obey God to be blessed by Him. He emphatically preached to them the fact God determined morality and not they themselves. He rebuked their sinfulness, attempting to reach them by reasoning with them and reminding them of God and who He was. In chapter ten we read where Jeremiah reasoned with them concerning their idols they worshiped. He pointed out they would cut down a tree, decorating and worshiping it, although it cannot talk, move about, etc. He then told them:

But the LORD *is* the true God, he *is* the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, *there is* a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures (Jer. 10:10-13).

God’s power is shown over the wooden idols of the heathen. God will one day consume their idols in fire, but He Himself will be avenged. He will endure because He is the One who made the wood they were using for gods. The foolishness of worshiping idols is shown by Jeremiah, and yet the people continued to walk down the road to despair and destruction. In all this behavior, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush. It was a sad day indeed in Israel when they could no longer blush.

NEITHER CAN THEY BLUSH IN OUR DAY

Man has not changed much over the centuries. There is a simple reason—Satan is still active and attacking. Peter writes, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). He is our adversary and he still attempts to move men to lose their sense of shame, following

him and his agents down the same road to despair and destruction as those in Jeremiah's day. There are various immoral avenues he exploits and explores today.

Abortion

Since 1973, there have been more than 30 million babies murdered by abortions in this country. One report says there have been 38,010,378.³ The annual number of abortions has more than doubled since "Roe vs. Wade," going from 744,600 abortions in 1973, to nearly 1.6 million in 1988. There are more than 4,300 abortions per day—that is one every 20 seconds!! Here are some more startling statistics: (1) 29% of all pregnancies end in abortion; (2) There are nearly 200,000 second and third trimester abortions each year. More than 17,000 of those occur after five months (20 weeks) of pregnancy; (3) Every year, more unborn children die by abortion than Americans who died in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars combined!! The reasons why so many abortions occur are varied, but there is a common dominator in the vast majority of the cases—selfishness. According to Planned Parenthood, just 7% of all abortions were chiefly motivated by the *hard cases*. These *hard cases* would include: (1) mother's health (3%); (2) the baby has a possible health problem (3%); (3) the pregnancy results from rape or incest (1%). The vast majority of the abortions occur due to *social* or *birth control* reasons. These include: (1) mother is unready for responsibility (21%); (2) mother cannot afford baby (21%); (3) concern about how baby would change mother's life (16%); (4) relationship problem (12%); (5) not mature enough (11%); (6) mother has all the children she wants (8%); (7) other reasons (4-5%).⁴ As we can see, 93% of abortions occur because man has devised a *better plan* in his mind than God has. Can America feel shame for doing this? No, she cannot even blush! As a nation, we ought to feel ashamed, and we truly ought to feel remorse for all the innocent babies who have been sent into eternity before they had the opportunity to mature. We ought to feel shame for the number of people who will never know the joy of watching that child develop and mature into a responsible human being to carry the gospel to the lost.

The Bible reveals that abortion is murder. No distinction is made in the Scriptures between babes in the womb and those already born. The Greek word *brephos* is used for both prenatal and postnatal babies and

it means "an unborn child, embryo, fetus, a newborn child, an infant." "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the **babe** leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost" (Luke 1:41). "And they brought unto him also **infants**, that he would touch them: but when *his* disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them" (Luke 18:15). The same Greek word is used for both the baby inside and the womb and outside the womb.

The growth or progression of a babe is interesting indeed:

18-25 days	Even before the mother is aware she is pregnant, the baby's heart is already beating.
40 days	Electrical waves from the baby's brain can be recorded, indicating brain function. The skeleton is developed in cartilage, and the first movement occurs.
8 weeks	The baby feels pain, will grasp, and swims. The heart-beat can be heard. Fingerprints are formed, the face appears human, limbs hinge on joints.
9-10 weeks	The baby sucks his thumb, somersaults, jumps, squints, swallows, and moves the tongue. 95% of known structures are present—tiny nerves and finger muscles are in place.
12-13 weeks	The baby recoils from pain and is developing fingernails.
4 th month	The baby goes through a very rapid growth spurt and may reach eight inches in length.
5 th month	The mother feels movement. The baby can sleep, wake, and hiccup. Skin, hair, and nails are growing. Fine hair begins to grow on the head; eyebrows and eyelashes begin to appear. Sweat glands arise and oil glands excrete. Survival outside the womb is possible.
6 th month	The baby responds to light and sound. He can hear his mother's heartbeat and recognizes her voice. The baby at this point leads an active emotional life and can learn.
7 th month	The nervous system is more complex, with substantial cerebral functioning and pain perception. If the child is delivered at this point, he can shed tears and cry. He has consciousness. Between the 28 th and 32 nd weeks, the brain's neural circuits are just as advanced as the newborn's. ⁵

As the above chart shows, babes in and out of the womb are alive. The Bible says that life is sacred and the innocent should be protected.

Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked (Exo. 23:7).

That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance, and *so* blood be upon thee (Deu. 19:10).

Cursed *be* he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed *be* he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deu. 27:24-25).

Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood (Psa. 94:20-21).

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood (Pro. 1:10-16).

These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood (Pro. 6:16-17).

The Bible also speaks as to the beginning of life. The world says it begins at birth; the Bible reveals it begins at conception.

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there* was none of them (Psa. 139:13-16).

The real question is: "Why must something be aborted if it is **not** living?" The truth of the matter is that it **is** living in the womb, and the babe has a soul given to it by God Almighty!

Should America be ashamed for all the abortions? Yes, she should be, but she cannot even blush. It is evident she cannot blush when one considers the methods used to abort the babes. Notice these cruel and inhumane methods:

1. Suction Curettage or D&C. This method is often used in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. A tiny, sharp, hoe-like instrument

is inserted through the dilated cervix (neck of the uterus), where the abortionist scrapes the wall of the uterus, cutting the baby’s body to pieces.

2. Suction abortion. In this method, a powerful suction tube is inserted through the cervix into the womb. The body of the developing baby and placenta are torn to pieces and sucked into a jar. This is the most commonly used method for early pregnancies.
3. Salt poisoning or saline abortions. This method is generally used after thirteen weeks of pregnancy. A long needle is inserted through the mother’s abdomen, and a strong salt solution is injected directly into the amniotic fluid which surrounds the child. The salt is swallowed and *breathed* and slowly poisons the baby, burning his skin as well. The mother goes into labor in about a day and delivers a dead fetus—burned skin. Some babies have survived and are born alive.
4. C-section abortion. This method is used during the last trimester of pregnancy, whereby the womb is entered by surgery through the abdominal wall. The baby is then removed and allowed to die by neglect or sometimes by direct act.
5. Prostaglandin chemical abortion. This newest form of abortions uses chemicals which cause intensive uterine contractions, thereby pushing the baby out of the uterus. The side effects of this method are many, and live births are common.
6. Intra cardia injection—the chemical digoxin is injected into the baby’s heart, causing immediate death.
7. Newer methods—for late-term abortions ensure an intact, but dead baby. California abortionist James McMahon told the *New York Times*, “I grab the fetus with a forceps to rotate it. The head gets trapped in the lower uterus. At that point he said, he pushes a small steel tube into the head and removes the spinal fluid. The head gets very small, he said, and he delivers the fetus.”⁶

The Babylonians and Assyrians were considered barbarians for the way they bashed babies and small children’s heads against walls and rocks, so as to kill them. We, likewise, allow babies heads to be bashed, we only

call it a *choice* a mother has! Yes, as a country, we ought to be ashamed, and yet, we do not blush about abortion—murder.

Immodesty

We ought to be ashamed when it comes to the manner in which this country dresses and the allowances so many make for the immodesty of our nation. We have allowed the lines of decency to be determined by culture and popular opinion, rather than, by the absolute standard of God's Word. What is the only sure and safe standard of modesty? What about society? Many people seem to justify wearing immodest clothing simply because it is the latest fashion or because of who is wearing it. Parents sometimes fall into this trap when it comes to what they allow their children to wear and where they allow them to go. You can hardly watch any television programs, movies, even commercials without being made aware of the emphasis placed upon the appearance of the human body.

With this in mind, think back to what society deemed modest and moral only a few years ago. The Dick Van Dyke show was one of the most popular shows from the previous generation. On that program separate beds were shown—even for the married people. What is the case today? Is it possible for America to blush? Vulgar language was **not** used in public, but now it is piped and cabled in without much restraint. Respect was placed upon dressing when going to worship God, but now we are told we must be *open-minded* about the culture in which we live. Importance was placed upon the marriage bond, but now marriage is viewed as something just from a previous generation—not now applicable to our modern people and our modern times.

Now consider what society deems modest and moral today. It seems nothing is withheld or held to sacred and holy any longer. The language we hear on television, even from children, is appalling. The lack of respect many place upon the dress code when coming to worship services makes the dedicated child of God weep aloud. Of course, the lack of clothing people wear in public must likewise be considered.

We can see even in the Garden of Eden, there was a distinction made in what man thought to be modest and what God decreed it was. The Bible records: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). They were innocent, not having developed the sense of shame which came when they sinned—this situation has

never existed since the garden of Eden! After man sinned, we read: "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3:7). These fig leaves would have been about what a swimming suit would be today. In many areas of our culture in this country, a swimming suit is deemed appropriate for public attire. Apparently, man must have thought likewise in the garden because he made them according to his liking. Notice what God revealed: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). God clothed them properly because they were not clothed properly with their fig leaves. The Hebrew word for coat means a garment covering from the shoulder to the knee (*Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*). The same Hebrew word is used to denote a *coat* in other places. One such place reads: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of *many* colours" (Gen. 37:3). We can see from this that God had a line of decency He wanted observed.

Often we are asked by our young people: "How short is too short?" We need to help them redirect their thinking when they ask this question. We do not need to see how close to "too short" we can get, but rather, how far away we can stay, remembering we are God's children who are the light of the world. A sure and safe guide is found in the Old Testament: "And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach" (Exo. 28:42). We know the priests were those who officiated at the altar and offered for the people. They would walk on an altar which was somewhat above the people. Moses wrote, "And thou shalt make an altar *of* shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be four-square: and the height thereof *shall be* three cubits" (Exo. 27:1). These priests in their coats and robes would walk about to do service before the Lord. What did the Lord consider would cover their nakedness? God considered from the loins to the thigh—from the waist to the knees. A safe guide for us today would be to wear whatever we wore in public at least knee length! The coats which God made for Adam and Eve would have been at least knee length and God considered this adequate. The priests' attire worn under their robes would have equal to knee length and

this was considered covering up their nakedness. These would certainly be safe for us also.

Let us say quickly, men and women are governed by God's standard. Men are more prone to sexual arousal by sight, but women are also to some degree. God does not have a double standard. Men ought not go around without shirts in public. Men ought not wear shorts higher than their knees in public. Men ought not wear tight fitting jeans and shirts which reveal the impression of their bodies. In other words, we ought to wear what is decent and appropriate according to the Divine standard.

Sadly, the same statement can be made about many of the Lord's people in our day as was made in Jeremiah's day. Far too many do not see the line of decency clearly marked by the Lord. Many parents allow their children to go mixed swimming, wear the latest fashions which are too immodest, go to the proms and such like dances (they ought not allow their children to go to dances seeing dancing is also a sin in and of itself), wear gowns which are too revealing, etc. When an eldership and/or preacher stands and rebukes them for such, they are marked as *judgmental*, *strait-laced*, or *legalistic*. It is a sad day in spiritual Israel, but it can be said far too many times: "Neither can they blush."

Social Drinking

The evils of alcohol remain as one of the leading problems we face in the country and the church. We live in a day when many argue in favor of what they call "social drinking." They justify drinking a few beers or mixed drinks by saying they are not drunk and the Bible **only** condemns drunkenness. So in their way of thinking it is acceptable to God to drink that which can make one drunk—just as long as one does not actually get *drunk*. They will argue that eating in and of itself is not sinful, but overeating is a sin; therefore, drinking in and of itself is not a sin—just the excess of it. Their reasoning is faulty because eating itself is not a sin, but the imbibing of alcoholic beverages is a sin. Let us notice some facts about alcohol and its effects:

1. Alcohol is our nation's number three health problem.
2. Alcoholism accounts for 25% of the patients in mental hospitals.
3. There are 9 million alcoholics in the US—showing the short step from "social drinking" to full-fledged alcoholism.

4. In 1970, according to an article published in the *Reader's Digest* more than 85 million Americans drank alcoholic beverages—about 79% of the men and 69% of the women.
5. About 75 million of those people were considered "social drinkers"—many of these are well-respected "pillars in the community" maybe even in the church—type of people—maybe even some reading this article drink a little or maybe do not see anything absolutely sinful about it.
6. It has been estimated that 1500 people daily cross the threshold into alcoholism.
7. 2/3 of those admitted to an alcohol clinic in an eastern city were alcoholics from **beer drinking**.
8. Kenneth L. Eaton, a researcher from the National Institute of Mental Health said that the 9 million alcoholics cost the nation 7 billion dollars annually.
9. 6 out of 10 highway deaths among young people involved alcohol and a total of 8,000 teenagers lost their lives due to alcohol last year.
10. Americans spend 10 billion dollars a year for alcoholic beverages. For every dollar of revenue received from the sale of liquor in the state of Massachusetts, they spend \$4.82 on liquor caused crimes and care of alcoholics. Dr. Melvin H. Knisely, head of Department of Anatomy at the Medical College of South Carolina, said alcohol can lead to blockage of blood in some brain cells, which then die. Among signs of brain damage from alcohol he noted were increasingly forgetfulness and loss of ability to work efficiently. He said: "When his level of social drinking is such that he feels very happy, a man is beginning to kill a few brain cells—the damage is permanent."
11. Dr. Haven Emerson of Columbia University said: "The higher qualities of the mind are first rubbed out by alcohol. The delicate capacities of intellectual decision, choice, discretion and willpower are those faculties that are first dulled and then wiped out by alcohol because they are least capable of withstanding its toxic effects."⁷

In an effort to justify imbibing alcoholic beverages today, many will argue that Jesus and those of His day had to drink alcoholic *wine* and

thus we are justified in drinking alcoholic drinks today in moderation—just not becoming *drunk*. In support of that fallacy, many of these same people will say those in Jesus' day had no way of preserving the grape juice, thus making it impossible to keep it from fermenting. However, we offer several arguments **against** such a notion. We need to keep in mind also that *wine* as used in the Scriptures comes from a generic Greek word and can mean either fermented grape juice or unfermented. The context must always bear out the exact meaning of the word.

1. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* notes that “there were means of keeping wine sweet all year round” (1648).
2. *Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by William Smith, “Sometimes it [wine] was preserved in its unfermented state, and drunk as must” (1774).
3. Same reference: “It is very likely that new wine was preserved in the state of must by placing it in jars or bottles, and then burying it in the earth” (1776).
4. If you wish to have must [grape juice] all year, put grape juice in an amphora (Greek jar with two handles and a narrow-neck and seal the cork with pitch; sink it in a fishpond. After 30 days take it out—it will be grape juice for a whole year (*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* 895).
5. Professor R.C. Foster, *Studies in the Life of Christ*: That the ancients knew the art of hermetically sealing up fluids is seen clearly in the incident of the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-9). The precious ointment was sealed up in a container. The moment the container was broken, the odor spread through all the house: “Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” (John 12:3). A Greek wine ship of the 2nd century B.C. found by divers off the southern coast of France several years ago contained a great number of wine flasks that had been sealed so tightly that after more than 2,000 years the sea water had not seeped into them.⁸

Jerry Moffitt points out four ways grape juice could be preserved: (1) boiling, which left too much sugar to ferment, (2) filtration, which got rid of the yeast, (3) subsidence, which allowed yeast to settle at the

bottom and was skimmed off, (4) fumigation, in which sulphur was used to absorb oxygen.

Since it can be proven those in Jesus' day could have sealed grape juice in such a manner as to keep it simply grape juice, we know it was possible for *wine* to simply mean grape juice.

We need to note at this point the fact that drunkenness is progressive. What does the Bible mean when it uses *drunkenness*? There are degrees of various stages of drunkenness—extremely important because many advocate social drinking because they feel the Scriptures **only** condemn drunkenness, not social drinking—they make a line between *moderation* and *intoxication*: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). The Greek word for *drunk* means: (1) *Vine*'s: to make drunk, or to grow drunk, to become intoxicated, (2) *Robert Young*: to begin to be softened, (3) *S. T. Bloomfield*: to moisten, or to be moistened with liquor and in a figurative sense, to be saturated with drink, (4) *E. W. Bulfinger*: to grow drunk, (5) *Thayer*: to get drunk, become intoxicated. These definitions establish beyond a shadow of a doubt that drunkenness is something that can grow, progress from one state to another, be considered as a state of becoming softened and therefore it is the beginning of even an advanced degree. The implication is that persons begin to be drunk when they begin to drink. No doubt many fail to see this point because of what we are accustomed to calling *drunk*. However, this is not the standard the Bible uses to determine drunkenness.

Eating is often used in defense of social drinking. When persons imbibe any amount of alcoholic drinks, according to the definition of the Biblical term *methusko*, they are softened, intoxicated, and drunk to that degree. Some argue that if this principle was applied to eating then a person would be full after only one bite. However, the same principle does apply! This principle indicates that people have begun the process of fullness after one bite. As they would be to that degree filled, so “social drinkers” are to that degree drunk.

What the Bible say concerning these matters? Notice these verses:

Wine *is* a mocker, strong drink *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise (Pro. 20:1).

For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries (1 Pet. 4:3).

Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21).

They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say, and* I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and* I felt *it* not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Pro. 23:30-35).

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares (Luke 21:34).

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment (Isa. 28:7).

For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night (1 The. 5:7).

The Bible nowhere authorizes the imbibing of alcoholic beverages. We live in a society which pressures Christians to fit into its mold. We must guard ourselves and our influence as we walk through this passing world. We need to remember the words of Peter: “Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). We must understand God does not just condemn the state of drunkenness and overlook the vehicle which brings us to that state! If it is sin to be drunk, it is sin to partake of that which makes us drunk!⁹

Sodomy or Homosexuality

This has become a major subject in our day. There is a terrible and timely warning given to us in 2 Peter 2:6, “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.” In the context, Peter is warning against following the false teachers of the day. Peter reveals that God is not going to let them go unpunished; neither will He allow their followers to escape. Peter uses examples from the past who practiced wickedness and ungodliness to show those of his day and

us there is no escape if we forsake the right ways of the Lord. He refers to some angels who chose to sin and thus were lost (2 Pet 2:4). He spoke of those in the days of Noah who did not obey God's commands (2 Pet. 2:5). Next, he used the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of ungodly living. What was the ungodliness for which they were known?

When the Bible student carefully examines the inspired record of the events surrounding these cities, he will see a great and godly lesson which needs to be proclaimed in the present generation. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sin and wickedness. Listen to the record: "For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it" (Gen. 19:13). Those speaking on this occasion were the angels sent by God to get Lot and his family out of the cities before the destruction. Earlier we read of the grievous sin of the cities: "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous" (Gen. 18:20). What was the major sin of the cities? The answer is **homosexuality**. When the angels came into the city, they went into Lot's house (Gen. 19:3). The men of the city came to the door and wanted Lot to send the angels whom they thought were men out to them that they might *know* them (Gen. 19:5). The men of Sodom did not just want to make their acquaintance; they wanted to *know* them sexually. Thus, for the sin of homosexuality, the cities were destroyed.

The Law of Moses condemned homosexuality. Moses wrote, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it *is* abomination (Lev. 18:22). Also we read, "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them" (Lev. 20:13). Under the Patriarchal system, God condemned man lying with man. Under the Law of Moses, God also condemned it. In the New Testament, our authority today, it is also condemned. Listen to Paul:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

When a man is with another man sexually, or a woman with a woman sexually, it is an abomination before God. God has so revealed in His will, and no law or generation can change this fact!

We see in the very beginning God's will concerning the sexual fulfillment of mankind. God intended for man and woman to be fulfilled, but only in the marriage bond—man with woman. In Genesis we read:

And Adam said, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh* (Gen. 2:23-24).

God created man with sexual desires and they are to be satisfied according to God's will. Likewise, God created woman with certain desires, and they too are to be satisfied only according to God's will. God did not create man with desires for man! God did not create man and then allow him to fulfill his own desires as he sees fit. The Creator rules in the life of His creation!

But today we hear a different message from every corner of our society. We hear the lifestyle of homosexuals referred to as “an alternate lifestyle.” Society places its decisions and judgments on a par equal with, or above, the God of heaven. In fact, many do not even believe there is a God in heaven who will judge the world in righteousness. We who live in America had better wake up and listen once again to Almighty God! We had better look to the example of Sodom and Gomorrah and realize the ungodliness of homosexuality. We had better beware, God did not tolerate these cities, and He will not tolerate America in its stubborn, rebellious, sinful living. In the past generation, abortion was made legal in this country, and now for more than twenty years we have been slaughtering our babies. Now in this generation there is the very real possibility laws will be passed which will forbid discrimination because of homosexuality. In other words, they would have to be treated as those of a normal lifestyle. There is nothing normal or moral about homosexuality. It is totally contrary to God's will and purpose for man and woman and no amount of man's writings will ever change this fact.

Are we listening today? Are we teaching our children the truth about this subject? Are we teaching them not to give in to the social pressures—no matter how much it is applied? Far too many parents take for granted the fact that their children will just *know* the truth about these matters. Our children are attacked from every conceivable angle today

concerning these two matters. They hear their sports heroes justify these things. They hear movie and television stars proclaim the idea it is a personal choice and that they should not be *judgmental* concerning others who do not see it their way. They hear their politicians preach the message of compromise concerning these things.

Can we see America headed the way of Sodom and Gomorrah? If the laws are passed and homosexuality is made *legal* in this country, would we be any better than Sodom? Notice what Moses wrote about Sodom: "But the men of Sodom *were* wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly" (Gen. 13:13). Why would we assume God would not look at America in the same light? God has warned about those nations that forget Him: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God" (Psa. 9:17). No nation has lasted which forgot God, and this one will be no exception. In the mind of this writer, we are in a crucial period of the history of this country. We have just lived through a generation which legalized the murder of innocent babies. Now we are on the threshold of legalizing homosexuality, the sin for which God utterly destroyed two cities and then told us they were our examples of ungodly living and its consequences. God does not have to rain down fire and brimstone from heaven to destroy a nation. If a nation forgets God, that nation will be brought down. Are we listening to God's Word? We need the ability to blush once again regarding this and all other moral issues.

CONCLUSION

America has been blessed beyond measure over the years by Almighty God. Perhaps one reason for the blessing is the fact our forefathers based the laws of America upon biblical principles. Many of our forefathers believed in the existence of God. Many of them respected His Divine principles and sought to govern by them. There was a time in this country when decency was a major concern in most families, and this concern was passed to the succeeding generations. However, today, this is no longer a rule in the majority of the homes. We see the home in jeopardy in many places. Humanism and liberalism seek to undermine the Divine blueprint for the home. They seek to exalt man to the forefront and allow him to govern as he sees fit. We need to instill once again the ability to blush and be ashamed at the condition in which we find ourselves. We need to learn

from Israel in Jeremiah's day that God will have the last say, and we had better listen while His mercy is still being extended.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Robert R. Taylor, *Studies In Jeremiah* (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1992), p. 71.

³Source for statistics for 1973 through 1992: Stanley K. Henshaw, et al., "Abortions Services in the United States, 1991 and 1992," *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (May/June 1994), p.101, available from <http://www.nrlc.org/abortion/aboramt.html>.

⁴This information was obtained through the National Right to Life Committee Handbook, 1992.

⁵This material was obtained from a chart sermon, but the original source cannot be traced.

⁶This information obtained through the National Right to Life Committee Handbook, 1992.

⁷Don Nix, *Palmetto Messenger*, weekly bulletin (Greer, SC: Greer Church of Christ, n.d.).

⁸Wayne Jackson, material taken from a tract entitled, *Does The New Testament Justify Social Drinking?*

⁹The majority of the foregoing material was obtained from various and sundry sources. One of the main sources was from William Jeffcoat, *The Bible and "Social" Drinking* (Corinth, MS: Robinson Typesetting, 1987).

“WE WILL NOT WALK THEREIN” JEREMIAH 6:16

Eddy Craft



Eddy Craft was born in Signal Mountain, Tennessee and graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1972. He has a weekly television program, *Biblical Viewpoints*, which is seen in Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and Jackson, Mississippi. He also is involved with a weekly radio program, *Arise To Truth*. He speaks on several lectureships and gospel meetings each year. Eddy has done local work in Saltville, Virginia; Rogersville, Tennessee; Abingdon and Luray, Virginia; and has been working with the church of Christ in Elizabethton, Tennessee, for the past twenty years.

Eddy is married to Betty (Cook) and they have three children, three grandchildren, and one due in July.

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein* (Jer. 6:16).¹

Some of the saddest words in the entire Bible are found in Jeremiah 6:16. The people of God said, “We will not walk *therein*.” It is truly a sad time when the people of God do not want to walk in the way of their God. In this lesson one of the things that we want to do is see what it was that got them where they were. What was their mind-set? The context will help us greatly relative to this point. Let us notice some of the things that got them where they were.

They had no desire for the Word of God.

To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear *is* uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, **the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach**; they have no delight in it (Jer. 6:10).

When the Word of the Lord becomes a reproach to God’s people, then it does not surprise us when they will not walk according to its teaching. The only hope that the people of God had was the Word of God and Jeremiah was preaching it to them; yet, they did not want to hear it. When

people will not let the Word of the Lord in their hearts, then sin will run rampant. One of the reasons we keep the Word of God in our hearts is to keep us from sinning, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). If we desire anything more than the Word of God, then we will not walk in the commandments of the Lord.

A second thing that kept the people of God from walking in the commandments was their covetousness. “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one *is given to covetousness*; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely” (Jer. 6:13). One of the things that will keep the people of God from following His will is covetousness. Jesus warned the people of His day of covetousness. “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). God’s teaching was not doing what God wanted it to do, because the hearts and minds of the people were so materialistic. We need to seek first the things of God. The people of God need to set their affection on things above.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:1-3).

In 28 years of preaching this writer has had people confess every kind of public sin; but in that time no one has confessed that he or she was guilty of the sin of covetousness.

A third thing that kept them from walking in the way of God was their false sense of security. “They have healed also the hurt *of the daughter* of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is no peace*” (Jer. 6:14). There are those today that go about telling people that they are all right. We have those who advocate “once saved, always saved” and have convinced people that they are all right, when in fact they are not. There are those who advocate one church is as good as another or that a person does not have to be baptized to be saved. Just as in the days of Jeremiah, people are saying peace and safety; but it is all false doctrine. Brethren, we must be careful not to become at ease in Zion. We must try the spirits to see if what they teach is the truth. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). False doctrine is running rampant now, as it was then; therefore, we must be on guard. When

people are teaching false doctrine, we must be very careful that we do not bid them God speed. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

A fourth thing that kept them from walking in the way of the Lord was their state of immorality.

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time *that* I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD (Jer. 6:15).

This point was also emphasized later in Jeremiah 8:12. The New Testament also shows how this problem has been typified of mankind.

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (Rom. 1:25-32).

Paul points out that they needed to repent of their immoral condition. Immorality will also keep the people of God from walking in the way of God. We as Christians are in the world, but we must not be partakers of their deeds: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17). But how apostasy occur? It does not take place over night. Little by little people get further and further away from God. Departure from God takes place a little at a time. Sin will take us further than we intended to go, keep us longer than we intended to stay, and cost us more than we intended to pay.

A fifth thing that kept the people from walking in the way of God was the corruption of the leaders of that day.

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:30-31).

Hosea made the same point. “And as troops of robbers wait for a man, *so* the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness” (Hos. 6:9). The devil knew if he could destroy the leadership, he would be able to be more effective.

Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed *difference* between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them (Eze. 22:26).

The devil made the same attack on the New Testament church.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

Satan went after the leaders of the church. If the leaders of the church do not watch for the souls and guard against Satan, then he will have a great victory over the church. This is the kind of picture that caused our Lord great sorrow: “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Mat. 9:36). Where there is no leadership, we have sheep that are just wondering around; they have no guidance.

Let us at this point notice the consequences of not walking in the way that God teaches. The people of God would reap what they had sowed. God said I will bring evil upon this people. “Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, *even* the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it” (Jer. 6:19). The people of God could not have acceptable worship as long as their lives were contrary to the will of God. “To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings *are* not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me” (Jer. 6:20). If we think that we can live like the devil all week and

come and worship the Lord on the Lord's day, we need to learn from the people in the days of Jeremiah. God will not accept our worship! Another consequence of failing to do the will of God is that He will put a stumblingblock before His people, "Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will lay stumblingblocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish" (Jer. 6:21). When we make up our minds that we are not going to serve God, then He will allow us to be deceived:

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 The. 2:10-12).

There was only one way the people of God could escape the punishment of God, and that was by repentance. "O daughter of my people, gird *thee* with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, *as for* an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us" (Jer. 6:26). The same is true for a rebellious people today: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

There are many false doctrines refuted by Jeremiah 6:16. One such doctrine is that one cannot understand the Bible alike. Jeremiah said we could understand what the old paths were and that all Israel could understand it alike. Verse 16 also refutes the idea that truth is not understandable and attainable. A lot of people think that truth is not knowable. Jeremiah said people could know the truth. Jesus also taught the same thing. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). God made man a rational being. Man can take evidence and draw conclusions that are warranted by that evidence and God demands that approach of man. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 The. 5:21). The child of God has always been obligated to defend what he believes. This is what Peter had in mind when he wrote, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). *Give an answer* means to make a defense. Therefore, truth is absolute and attainable! Before each person there are the ways of men and the way of God, and man can make the right choice. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are*

the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). It is very sad that God’s people had chosen to go that way.

Jeremiah 6:16 also teaches that one can do the will of the Lord. People today tell us that we cannot keep the commandments of God. Well, Jeremiah did not have that understanding. He taught that the people could walk in the ways of God. Jeremiah also refutes the idea that man does not have a choice. The people of God could walk in His way or in the ways of men, and they had to make the choice. The Calvinist argues that we do not have choices; God has already made them for us. This verse also refutes the idea that truth is subjective and not objective. Truth is objective. That is, truth is outside of man. Jeremiah said it very well in the following verse, “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). If truth were subjective, then man would be able to direct his own steps. It is a sad mistake for man to trust in his own heart. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered” (Pro. 28:26). It always has been the case that when man leaves God’s objective truth and trusts in his own way, he gets further into trouble.

Jeremiah also teaches that we must do something to be saved. The people were commanded to walk in the way of God. Those who advocate the doctrine that a person does not have to do anything to be saved ought to read Jeremiah 6:16. The false doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is also refuted. The people in the days of Jeremiah were commanded to remain faithful. This teaching is true throughout the Bible. The Bible paints a sad picture of the unfaithful.

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto

repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).

To put to an "open shame" meant to make a public spectacle of the Lord. What a sad picture! What could be worse?

The people in Jeremiah's day were rejecting the only means of salvation that they were ever going to have. When we reject the Word of God, the same is true. When we reject faith, repentance, or baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of our sins, we are making the same mistake that the people in the days of Jeremiah were making. Friends, Mark 16:16 will read the same at the day of judgement as it reads now! So will Acts 2:38 and Romans 6:3-4. If we reject these or any other Scriptures that are pertinent to our salvation, we will reject the only means of salvation that we will ever have. God's Word is His power to save. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Jesus was very clear in His teaching on this subject. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). John, in the last book of the New Testament, taught the very same thing.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

Jeremiah was preaching the Word of God to the people of his day, but they were not listening to what he had to say. Though Jeremiah became discouraged he still preached the Word to them.

Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay* (Jer. 20:9).

Jeremiah was a watchman for the people but they were not going to listen. "Also I set watchmen over you, *saying*, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken" (Jer. 6:17). Gospel preachers today are watchmen as well, and we must preach even if the people will not listen.

Jeremiah taught that, if the people would obey God, they could find rest for their souls. Those of us who are children of God know the great

benefit of having rest for our souls. *Rest* in the Bible is a very interesting word to study. Rest is a universal human longing; and, although in youth the desire for rest might not be so urgently felt, its need and urgency, with increasing rigor, appear more and more as life unfolds. The Psalmist points this out: "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! *for then* would I fly away, and be at rest" (Psa. 55:6). Job also wanted rest. "*There* the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor" (Job 3:17). The idea expressed by Jeremiah is that the people of God would have rest for their souls. There is peace, comfort, and assurance of knowing that they are pleasing to God. There is also something else involved here. If the people of God wanted to some day enjoy the final rest, they must be obedient to the will of God. Notice how the Bible makes this point.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, as I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh *day* on this wise, and God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this *place* again, if they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, to day, after so long a time; as it is said, to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:1-11).

As the Hebrews writer pointed out, there is a rest that remains for the people of God who will keep His commandments whether they lived under the Old Testament or New Testament. God's rest is the heavenly rest. God's rest is made sure to all Christians who like Joshua and Caleb continue faithful to the end of life. With this in mind we can see what the Israelites were missing out on; not only then, but also forever!

The Christian rest includes rest in Christ, as procured by taking His yoke and learning of Him. "Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat. 11:28-29). There is rest from the labors of life. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). This rest also involves rest with God in heaven throughout all eternity. The promise is still left open to the people of God. The Israelites had drifted away from this promise, as well as some before and after them. The word preached to the ancient Israelites did not profit them, because it was not met with faith on their part. Hearing only is of no benefit; hearing is essential, but is profitable only if it produces faith which obeys. The people in the days of Jeremiah heard the Word of God and refused to obey it; as a result, they lost out on the greatest blessing that they could have ever received. Our Lord pointed out this crucial point in the Sermon on the Mount.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Mat. 7:24-27).

The only difference between the wise and foolish was that one was a doer of the Word and the other was a hearer only. One cannot have that eternal rest unless he obeys the Word of God. James also makes this point.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jam. 1:22-25).

It would be easier to try to ride a dead horse to Tennessee as to ride a dead faith to heaven.

In bringing this study to a close, let us once again look at the admonition that Jeremiah gave to the people of God. He told them "**to stand**"

which meant to halt from their headlong rush into destruction. He urged them to choose the path of God and give adherence to His teachings. True reformers are not those who are advocating new things, but those who give due weight to old truths. They did not need a new hermeneutic, and neither do we. Jeremiah also says “**to walk,**” suggesting continuous action. It is not enough to be a child of God, but we must continue to grow in the Lord. The apostle John also taught this principle to the Christians of his day. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The person that walks in the old path will find rest for his soul.

The people of Jeremiah’s day had rejected the prescription for deliverance. God was going to make an example out of them for the nations to learn from. If the nations really knew what was going on in Judah, they would be able to apply the lesson to themselves.

No sadder words could have been spoken when the people of God said, “**We will not walk therein.**” May God help us, as His people, not to ever reach the point where we will refuse to walk in the old paths! If we do not have Bible authority for what we do in religion, then we need to give it up. We cannot walk in the old paths if we do not have the Word of God directing us. Let us never forget that there is not a more deplorable picture than that of a Christian that is lukewarm. “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15-16). To walk in the Lord’s way is the message of the day!

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“IS IT NOTHING?” LAMENTATIONS 1:12

Gary L. Grizzell



Gary L. Grizzell is a native Tennessean. He is married to Lois (Sewell), and they have one son, Tyler. Gary is a graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching and Tennessee Bible College (B.A., *Magna Cum Laude*). He has done local preaching in Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Gary is the author of the book *Unscriptural Binding*, a recent written debate on three *anti* doctrines, 17 tracts, and also writes for several brotherhood publications. He is the Editor/Publisher of *Pillars Publications*, through which he distributes doctrinally sound gospel tracts. Gary is presently working with the Alexandria Church of

Christ in Alexandria, Tennessee.

INTRODUCTION

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted *me* in the day of his fierce anger (Lam. 1:12).¹

Report from the Preacher Search Committee

“We do not have a happy report to give. We have not been able to find a suitable candidate for this church, though we have one promising prospect still. We do appreciate all the suggestions from the church members, and we have followed up each one with interviews or calling at least three references. The following is our confidential report on the present candidates.

Adam: Good man but problems with his wife.

Noah: Former preacher of 120 years with no converts. Prone to unrealistic building projects.

Moses: A modest and meek man, but poor communicator, even stuttering at times. Sometimes blows his stack and acts rashly. Some say he left an earlier church over a murder charge.

David: The most promising leader of all until we discovered the affair he had with his neighbor’s wife. Also thought to have murdered her husband and used the power of his office to avoid charges.

Elijah: Prone to depression—collapses under pressure.

Elisha: Reported to have lived with a single widow while at his former church.

Hosea: A tender and loving preacher but our people could never handle his wife's occupation.

Jeremiah: Emotionally unstable, alarmist, negative, always lamenting things, and reported to have taken a long trip to bury his underwear on the bank of a foreign river.

Amos: Too backward and unpolished. With some training he might have promise, but has a hang-up against wealthy people—might fit in better with a poor congregation.

John: Says he is a Baptist, but definitely does not dress like one. Has slept in the outdoors for months on end, has weird diet, and provokes denominational leaders.

Peter: Too blue collar. Has a bad temper—even has been known to curse. Had a big run-in with Paul in Antioch. Aggressive, but a loose cannon.

Paul: Powerful CEO type leader and fascinating preacher. However, short on tact, unforgiving with young preachers, harsh, and has been known to preach all night.

Timothy: Too young.

Jesus: Has had popular times, but once when his church grew to 5,000 he managed to offend them all and his church dwindled down to 12 people. Seldom stays in one place very long. And, of course, he is single.

Judas: His references are solid. A steady plodder. Conservative. Good connections. Knows how to handle money. We are inviting him to preach this Sunday. Possibilities here.²

Obviously, if that particular preacher search committee had interviewed the great, sacrificial prophet Jeremiah, they would not have selected him.

Context of Jeremiah's Statement

The southern kingdom had fallen into Babylonian captivity. Judah and the city of Jerusalem has been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the temple burned (2 Kin. 25:21; 2 Chr. 36:17-21). There were three invasions in all (606, 597, and 586 B.C.). God has used His servant, the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar, to take Judah into captivity for 70 years because of the sins of the people (2 Chr. 36:14-16). Out of all God's people, only Jeremiah, the vinedressers, and the poor have been left in Jerusalem and Judah. The place of worship, the temple, is gone; God's

beloved city is wiped out, and Jeremiah questions those indifferent, uncaring ones who pass with the question: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" The weeping prophet's great lamenting is reflective of his love for God, his love for Israel, and the sacred things of God.

The Old Testament is written for our learning, and therefore we may learn from Jeremiah, the heart of a servant of God (Rom. 15:4). We also may learn to ask the question: "Is it nothing?" to bring people's attention to the precious will of God, the salvation of souls, and our responsibilities to God's cause.

FALSE DOCTRINES AND WHAT THESE ARE DOING TO THE CHURCH

Is it Nothing to You When You See Some Attacking the Kingdom from Within?

There Are Dangers From Within. Paul wrote:

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (Phi. 3:17-19).

The September 29, 1999 Woodmont Hills Church of Christ bulletin advertised the Billy Graham crusade, saying:

By now it is likely that you have heard the news that Billy Graham is planning an evangelistic crusade for Nashville in the spring of next year. This crusade has the potential to be a significant event in the spiritual life of many people in our city...Woodmont Hills supports the decision of Dr. Graham and his ministry team to be in Nashville....It is important for the members of our church family to understand why we will be enthusiastic participants....The Graham Crusade will challenge the church in Nashville to reap a harvest of souls to God's glory....With the blessing of our shepherds, Rubel Shelly is serving as a General Committee Member on behalf of this outreach effort. Several of our shepherds wrote letters of invitation to Dr. Graham to encourage him to come to our city.³

Next comes the "Christian Life and Witness Class" wherein those who are "13 years and older" will be trained to work with the Graham crusade. Topics include "The Christian Witness" and "Serving as A Counselor at the Crusade." Then there is this: "Note: you must attend the

classes to be a counselor at the crusade.” Under “Positions available” comes this duty: “Help those needing assistance to get to their seats.”⁴

Brethren, if we would teach lost souls, we must recognize the ongoing spiritual war, appreciate that we are soldiers in the army of King Jesus, put on the whole armour of God, recognize that the fight is not against flesh and blood, courageously fight the battle and free the captives with the gospel of Christ. We, as the army of Christ, must be constantly aware that Satan has manipulated some among our ranks to fit the description Paul gave to the Philippian church, namely: “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phi. 3:18-19). There are disciples of the cross and then there are disciples of the double-cross such as those of Woodmont Hills who assist a faith-only false teacher like Billy Graham!

Is it Nothing to You When You Witness the Compromising of the Bible’s Teaching of Guilt by Association?

The July 1999 issue of *Gospel Advocate* included an article written by brother Cecil May entitled: “Guilt By Association.” Brother May tells us: “They should address the specific truths the people to whom they are speaking need to hear.” Why then, if May believed what he wrote, could he not be warned about having F. LaGard Smith as a speaker at Faulkner University on October 23-24, 1998?

When Smith fellowshipped the denominational preacher Pat Robertson on the “700 Club,” did he address the specific truths the people needed to hear? Did he publicly expose Robertson and his error on water baptism? How about the teaching about the distinctive nature of the Lord’s church and the sinfulness of denominationalism (Acts 2:38, 47; Mat. 16:18; Eph. 4:1-6; et al)?

It has been known for some time that F. LaGard Smith has spoken on lectureships/programs in association with false teachers **without rebuking those false teachers** and exposing their false teachings. Why would the Dean of the School of Biblical Studies at Faulkner University promote such a one in violation of 2 John 9-11? Is it not now sheer hypocrisy to pen an article concerning the teaching of 2 John 9-11?

Seven brethren wrote to brother May (including a Faulkner student) warning him of the false teaching of brother Smith—to no avail. This writer is one who engaged in correspondence with brother May. In an e-mail dated Oct 26, 1998 I responded:

Brother May,...I am in receipt of your email (dated Friday, October 23, 1998)...Smith is liberal concerning the necessity of one understanding the purpose for immersion at the time he is immersed....Brother May, do you believe as F. LaGard Smith that the question about whether to accept one who was immersed—while thinking he was already saved—is “*a grey area*,” a “*shadowy area*,” and that advocating that one must understand that baptism is for the remission of sins at the moment he is immersed is “*a tougher brief to argue than we’ve ever before admitted*” and an “*enigma*”?...If Smith taught the truth on the Faulkner campus on Oct. 23 and 24, he needs to retract what he wrote in his book on baptism/fellowship (in the case of accepting ALL immersed individuals, meaning those denominationalists who did not understand the purpose of baptism while undergoing their immersions).

No answer has been forthcoming. However, Cecil’s article teaches there is no such thing as guilt by association. Nine times he used “guilt by association” but never once in his article admitted that there is a type of guilt by association which causes one to be a partaker of other men’s sins. Instead, he only admits: “Such preachers are guilty, convicted of error, because they preach what is not biblical.”

Jesus *scripturally* associated (in the sense that He was in the presence of and had a conversation) with an adulterous woman in the temple court (John 8:1-11). He did not *unscripturally* associate with her by being a partaker of her sins. Note that He told the woman to “go, and sin no more.” Had Jesus just said, “Go,” He would have become guilty by association. How? By His silence He would have given implicit endorsement of her sinful behavior. But since He added, “sin no more,” He kept himself pure. Paul wrote, “neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22).

Did Paul speak just *any* truth or the *needed* truth in his situation with Peter in Antioch (described in Gal. 2:11-14)? He preached the needed truth! If Paul had exercised dignified silence while Peter was leading Gentile Christians astray, then brother May might (if consistent) describe Paul as one only deserving of having “questions about him rightly raised,” but that this was certainly “not guilt by association.” However, if Paul had not rebuked Peter to his face before them all, he would have been a partaker of Peter’s sin.

Giving verbal or nonverbal endorsement of a false teacher constitutes guilt by association. (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11). After bidding Godspeed

to a false teacher, simply writing an article and pretending to be an angel of light will not suffice. (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

Liberal Wineskins Periodical

In *Wineskins* brother Mike Cope wrote an article entitled: “Is It An Identity Crisis?” (March/April 1996). Among other things he wrote:

I sense that we’re discussing more freely the Holy Spirit. We’re learning about and experiencing his guidance, his renewal, his conviction. (Our doctrine never got farther off course than when some claimed the Holy Spirit’s work is limited to the work of Scripture).

Observe how a false teacher works through deception. Note how his wording leaves important things unsaid. He states that the Holy Spirit guides the Christian, but he did not explain **how** the Spirit guides. We all know the Spirit guides, instructs, and convicts of sin through His Sword, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Did Cope say this? **No!** What **did** he say? He advocates brethren in the past were *off course* by teaching the Spirit’s work is *limited* to the work of the Word of God. Now, such sophistry is identifiable. He leaves us with an open-ended statement. When God works in non-miraculous providential ways, this is **external** to the Christian (Rom. 8:28). The Christian is not acted upon by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit today (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Cope writes in an ambiguous manner; he can be understood in different ways. Preachers are to preach and write in a definitive way; otherwise the gospel loses its simplicity (2 Cor. 11:3).

Cope is an educated man and a talented speaker; are we to believe he cannot express himself clearly? Is there any reason his readers (if they accept what he wrote) may not go to worship this Sunday believing the Holy Spirit may give them a psalm (an inspired message from the Holy Spirit) or a tongue (to minister to the assembly)?

Brethren, beware of such writers! Do not miss it: false teachers teach and influence by what they do not say (as well as what they say), by letting a question dangle, by not qualifying a statement, and by leaving room for doubt. Innocent, biblically uninformed babes in Christ will be deceived by such sophistry and subtlety. Those of us who are aware of the devices of the devil (2 Cor. 2:11) must expose his tricks and make people aware:

That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and cunning*

craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:14-15).

Is it Nothing to You When You See the Lack of Respect for the Authority of the Bible?

There are a number of reasons we should love, honor, and respect the Word of God. The Bible gives us a knowledge of the existence of God, creation, Jesus Christ, salvation, heaven, and hell. It gives us a knowledge of God's will for us (Eph. 5:17). The Word of God frees us from sin and all its evil consequences which reach out to grab and destroy us. It frees us from the power of sin (Col. 1:13-14). It frees us from the pollution of sin, i.e. guilt and fear (2 Tim. 1:7). It frees us from the pleasure of sin (Heb. 11:25). It frees us from the old man of sin (Rom. 6:3-4). It offers us heaven where we will be free from the presence of all temptation and sin. The Bible tells man of his origin, his purpose of existence, and his destiny (Gen. 1:1; Ecc. 12:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:10). The Bible is the only book that deals sufficiently with the subject of death.

Though God has given us the Bible to guide and instruct man in the way of righteousness, why then is the nation (and the world) so full of sin problems? All one has to do is read the daily newspaper or watch the evening news to see that our society is full of crime and sin. We should be concerned upon recognizing that God eventually delivers an increasing rebellious people into the hands of its enemies (Neh. 9:26-27).

Disrespect for God's Word is the greatest reason for the sin problems in the world. Why are all the sin problems in existence in our society such as abortion, homosexuality, immorality, unethical conduct, active euthanasia, humanistic philosophies, religious error, etc.? Why is it the case that **most** will be lost on the day of judgment? The reason is that age-old problem of mankind: a **lack of respect** for the authoritative Word of God.

What are the five steps which constitute the plan of salvation according to the New Testament? A lost and dying world answers: "Well, I do not know, and I do not care" (hear, Rom. 10:17; believe, John 8:24; repent, Luke 13:3; confess, Rom. 10:9-10; be baptized, Acts 2:38). What are the five authorized acts of worship which God accepts in the Christian Age? Again, the answer comes from many: "I do not know and I do not care" (Lord's supper, Acts 20:7; singing, Eph. 5:19; prayer, 1 Cor. 14:15; contribution, 1 Cor. 16:2; preaching, 2 Tim. 4:2). What

does the New Testament teach about faithful Christian living? What is the work of the Lord's church? What is the church authorized to do and not to do? What three ways does the Bible authorize a religious belief or practice? Again, the many say: "I do not know and I do not care." However, the Bible teaches that all men **will** reap what they sow and that God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7-8).

The Bible shows the way to abundant life (John 10:10; John 14:6). May we show God we appreciate Him giving us His book by: studying it, believing it, practicing it, and teaching it to others. Then we can say with David: "O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day....thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:97, 105).

Is it Nothing to You When You See Liberalism?

The main force eating away at the very foundation of Christianity today is liberalism. Liberalism is an attitude of a lack of respect and appreciation for divine Truth. Liberalism in its essence and heart is evil. It is destructive, deceiving, and sly. Those who practice it remind us of the most subtle beast of the field, the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6; Rev. 12:9). It is responsible for a multitude of false doctrines which have caused men to be eternally separated from the God of heaven.

Whatever form this deadly monster takes, it is just as damnable and hurting. However, it would seem that the most deceiving and harmful form through which it works is that of the wolf in sheep's clothing. The Lord warned: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). Every true sheep should beware of the false sheep who seeks to devour. To *beware* implies the importance of knowing the characteristics for which to watch. Notice a few of the characteristics for which to watch in turning the light on the evil-doer of darkness (Eph. 5:11). (1) A wolf in sheep's clothing looks like the other sheep (2 Cor. 11:13-15); (2) Jesus said that "inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15); (3) A wolf masquerades as a mature, experienced follower of the shepherd; (4) The wolf in sheep's clothing likes being a wolf; (5) The wolf cares not for the shepherd or sheep.

While we fight Satan on the front line in our evangelistic efforts to move ahead in a positive direction, let us not forget the destructive cancer that is eating daily in our barracks.

Is it Nothing to You When You See Digression?

There was an article in the "Religion" section published by *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), dated Sunday, May 23, 1999, of concern to faithful brethren. It was entitled: "Congregation's Use of Music Creates Echoes of Discord" by Ray Waddle, Religion Editor. The following statements were found in the article:

Community Church of Christ in Hendersonville recently tested the limits of Church of Christ identity.

Leaders worked some recorded instrumental music into the Easter Sunday service last month.

What sounds trivial to outsiders is a potential cataclysm in the Church of Christ fellowship, a major religious force in Middle Tennessee.

"My opinion is we're on a road to a new understanding," said Maury Buchanan, a member there and a professional missionary organizer.

Maury Buchanan: "When Jesus returns, he plays a trumpet. We have to understand it's OK for him to do that."

"It's an awesome place to be," member Buchanan said. "Those people know the grace of God."

We do love the name "Church of Christ." It's a beautiful name.

I responded by writing: "An Open Letter To Community Church of Christ—Progressive or Digressive?" I mailed a copy to the elders there, and to Ray Waddle. It also served as a form of a review. It is believed that such an effort is necessary and of interest to all of God's people today who are truly dedicated to the restoration of doctrinally pure, New Testament Christianity.

Among many other things, I wrote:

What a crying shame! Those who desire to reject plain Bible teaching and shame the cause of Christ also just love the name "Church of Christ." Yes, I and other faithful brethren agree that the expression is a beautiful expression. It is found within the statement, "The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). However, after that expression is found in Holy writ, Paul stated in the next verse to mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine and avoid them (Rom. 16:17).

Since you, the Community so-called "Church of Christ" insist on perverting God's pattern for church worship, then, as a member of the blood-bought church of Christ (and a preacher of the gospel), I plead with you to either repent or cease calling yourselves by such a beautiful name. Instead of bringing further shame and disgrace on the church of our Lord before a lost and dying world, won't you change

your name to identify yourselves with the tried-and-found wanting denominations around you. For truly, this is the camp to which you belong.

This author received no response. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

Correspondence with Herald of Truth

One representative of the Herald of Truth ministries did respond (note excerpts below).⁵

Randy Becton: You may not realize the power of hearing men and women tell non-Christians about the truth and power of God's word to cope with life's challenges.

Gary Grizzell: The power is in the gospel itself, according to the inspired apostle Paul (note Rom. 1:16-17— For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation). The power to save is not in the testimony of one saved today, but in the preaching of Christ's testimony of his identity as the Son of God, His miracles, his meaningful death, burial, and resurrection. The power to save is not in the life story of one saved today, but the power is in the record of the life of the central character of the gospel, that is, the Christ! Paul told the Corinthians that he determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). Frankly, I have to pinch myself to realize my task is to tell you (a preacher with the church of Christ) that personal testimonials are not the same as gospel preaching which the Lord commanded (Mk. 16:15).

The issue is not whether or not we may share with one another about our conversions per se in our daily lives, but the issue here revolves around the fact that personal testimonials and endless personal stories and experiences must not be used as a substitute for straight-forward gospel preaching which the Lord commanded (I Cor. 1:18).

Randy Becton: "Shouldn't you and I encourage each other to...reach as many for God, His word, and the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ as we can?"

Gary Grizzell: Can I scripturally encourage one who is an elder where brother Mike Cope (liberal change agent) is the preacher? (not according to 2 Jn. 9-11)...The elders of Highland, while arguing that they can oversee the HOT from the position of directors of an institution which has no legal connection with the Highland church, when wearing the hat of elders back at Highland, have Mike Cope, known false teacher, under their oversight. Does bidding Godspeed meaning nothing to these brethren? (2 Jn. 10-11)...I wish to encourage any and every good work which truly preaches the gospel. It gives me no pleasure whatsoever to pen these words of criticism to you. However, when denominationalistic type testifying is portrayed as gospel

preaching and women’s testimonials are substituted for Christian male gospel preaching, not only is God’s divine pattern being violated, but the souls of men are a stake (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8, 11-15; 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Cor. 11:3).”

The following excerpts are taken from the Highland Church of Christ’s present website. These are things offensive to all sound brethren. We must ask the question: should such a church have the right even claim to oversee a television evangelistic program?

Announcement of classes to be taught at the Highland church:

“Mike Cope—Preaching Minister since 1991. Co-editor of *Wineskins* magazine and author of *One Holy Hunger, Righteousness Inside Out, Living In Two Worlds*, and (with Rubel Shelly) *What Would Jesus Do Today?*”

“On Wednesday evenings this summer our children entering 1st - 5th will meet in the gym for praise, stories and activities. Our summer theme will be “Hooked on Jesus” (a study of the beatitudes).”

This author made this comment to Randy Becton:

Highland’s gymnasium—(where is the authority for this image of the church to be plastered on the world wide net? Obviously, Highland has lost sight of the true nature and mission of the Lord’s church in a lost and dying world).

This one also found:

PASSOVER MEAL—Our Passover meal together was wonderful. Thanks to Britt, Jill and all the others who worked so hard preparing all the food and securing the authentic decorations.

This scribe again commented to Randy Becton:

No explanation was given to the non-Christian world about the following. What would the non-Christian reading this think about the church of Christ and the church’s relationship to the Old Testament feast days?

Then there was this:

Children’s Worship: During our Sunday 10:30 assembly, the three to five year olds are offered the opportunity to be part of Children’s Worship.

Is it Nothing to You When Fatal Error Publicly Taught Goes Uncorrected?

Hugo McCord authored an article entitled: “Faith and Knowledge” appearing in a 1984 issue of *Gospel Advocate*. He believes that knowledge is not a matter of certainty, but religious knowledge is not based

on assumptions. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The very definition of faith is *substance* and *evidence*. To argue that there one must first assume certain things (as brother McCord did) is to argue the false doctrine of *Presuppositionalism*. This view of epistemology says that we must simply assume the existence of God, that we can know, and that we can gain knowledge. Then, based on a system of assumptions we then go on to build our lives and our case for Christianity. Who can believe such?

Epistemology is a study of *what* can be known and *how* knowledge may be gained. It is this author’s opinion that, since this topic is not studied in most Bible classes, it goes misunderstood, misinterpreted, and ignored by some honest folks.

Faithful Christians do not believe that in order to know saving religious knowledge (the gospel), they must first assume that the universe exists, that human beings exist, et al. (Rom. 1:20; Psa. 19:1-3; Heb. 11:6).

To argue two definitions of faith is deceptive and causes doubt. Consider the two definitions of faith in such a situation.

1. The first faith is considered a faith *without* proof (regarding existence of God and self). Supposedly, this is a faith to be possessed *before* one comes to a *religious* knowledge. This is “assuming without proof” or walking by assumption (cf., Heb. 11:1, 6; Rom. 10:17; 1:20). The truth is, if one has faith, he at that moment possesses religious knowledge!

2. The second faith is a faith *with* proof (attained by reading and believing God’s Word). This is why the *presuppositionalist* may argue fervently that he believes he can possess knowledge by the reading of the Bible, because in this context he is talking about his second definition of *faith*. However, if you talk to him concerning his view of the first *faith*, his message is foreign to Scripture, compromising, weak, and apostate (cf., Col. 2:8).

This view of brother McCord that one first **as a necessity** has a faith without proof—then proceeds to a faith with proof—is not taught anywhere in the Bible.

Error is error and when it is taught publicly, it should be corrected publicly, either by the writer of the error or someone else (Acts 8:18-23; Gal. 2:11-14). It has been common for some in the past to argue that it

is *more reasonable* to believe in the existence of God as opposed to actually saying that "I know that God exists" (Psa. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:20).⁶

Is it Nothing to You When Satan Produces Perversions of God's Inspired Word?

Is the New International Version a reliable translation of God's inspired Word? The New International Version's translation of Romans 10:10 teaches the doctrine of salvation by "faith only" and thus is not reliable. A preacher who teaches this doctrine is not reliable. However, if a preacher reads the NIV's translation of Romans 10:10 (simply *believe* and you are justified) and does not say anything about its error, then that preacher is a teacher of error as much as the preacher who advocates the doctrine. And if an individual follows that teaching, he will not obtain salvation and will one day lose his soul in Hell!

Any man who advocates that Romans 10:10 (as translated by the NIV) is reliable, reveals he is unreliable himself. Someone may say: "Oh, but every man should be allowed to express his opinion concerning the translation issue." The real issue is that no man has the right to advocate false doctrine by implication. To state that the *New International Version* is a reliable translation is to **imply** that what is taught in the NIV (for example, the false doctrine of "faith only") is reliable.

There is much more error in the NIV. The NIV not only teaches the doctrine of "faith only" but also a number of other doctrines which violate plain scriptural teaching: premillennialism, being *included in Christ* just by hearing the gospel, miraculous gifts for today, and Sabbath observance for today.

The NIV teaches John Calvin's inherited sin in Psalms 51:5. It has David saying, "I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." However, Jesus said that to enter the kingdom of heaven one must become as a little child (Mat. 18:1-4). Did Jesus mean that to enter the kingdom one must become a little sinner? If the NIV is correct, He must have meant this. Those who so pervert God's Word will answer to God at the Judgment (Gal. 1:7-9; 6:7-8). The NIV is a commentary and a poor one at that! A commentary does not deserve to be called: "Holy Bible." Let us contend for the faith once delivered, not a corruption of the faith due to a corrupt translation (Jude 3).

Is it Nothing to You When Some Teach That All the Christian Life Is Worship?

What is *reductio ad absurdum*?

A method of proving that a proposition must be false [or true] by assuming the truth [or falsity] of the proposition and then showing that this assumption, taken together with other premises whose truth is already established, would lead to a contradiction (or, at least, to an obvious falsehood). This method is sometimes called indirect proof.⁷

If It Is True That All Of A Christian's Life Constitutes "Worship" (except when sinning), Then:

1. When a group of Christians (separate and apart from the worship assembly where the Lord's Supper is taken) sing a secular (non-religious but morally pure) song, while playing musical instruments (such as the guitar, piano, flute) to accompany their singing, this using of mechanical instruments to accompany singing is acceptable worship to God. (cf., Eph. 5:19).
2. When intently watching a football game on TV, one may worship God without doing it "in spirit" (Jn. 4:24). (Jesus teaches that, when scriptural worship takes place, it is to be done "in spirit" and "in truth" [Jn. 4:24]. The expression "in spirit" refers to sincerity of heart [mind] involving concentration and conscious purpose.)
3. One may worship God while having no thought of glorifying God, but of only of enjoying himself in pure recreation. (read Jesus in John 4:24—"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth").
4. The expression public worship is defined as "every public scriptural action performed by an individual Christian each day he lives."
5. The expression private worship is defined as "every private scriptural action performed by an individual Christian each day he lives."
6. The number of acts of worship are the number of authorized actions, both public and private, of the individual Christian.
7. The individual Christian determines the number of acts of worship each day by the number of authorized actions he can accomplish, no matter how mundane.
8. It is possible to perform 1,000 acts of worship in one day (or more). Some members of the church could probably bounce a tennis ball 1,000 times in a day, easy!
9. The pattern for worship becomes the daily behavior of the Christian, as opposed to a pattern revealed by an objective body of teaching (cf., Acts 2:42; 2 Jn. 9-11; Jn. 4:23-24).

10. There are other acts of worship to God other than prayer, singing spiritual songs, preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and giving. These other acts include but are not limited to: sleeping, walking, and jogging.

11. Things we normally think of as mundane in nature do not tend to diminish the significance of these aforementioned divinely given five acts of worship.

12. When a football player (who happens to be a faithful Christian) catches a pass and runs for a touchdown to the cheering of the crowd, it is correct to say he performed an act of PUBLIC worship.

13. An example of the difference between private and public worship could be as follows: 1) The act (action) of blowing one’s nose into a handkerchief in the confines of one’s own house, and 2) The act (action) of blowing one’s nose in a crowded elevator.⁸

What does Romans 12:1 really mean? There is no evidence in the New Testament which authorizes any man living to teach that all the Christian life is one continual worship service to God, even with the tacked on disclaimer: *except when sinning*. Those who teach such usually claim Romans 12:1 teaches it, but they ignore the context of Paul’s statements. Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service*” (Rom. 12:1).

Paul commands the Christian to offer himself once and for all time to God as a living sacrifice. The result of this is that he refuses to conform himself to the sinful standard of the world and instead seeks to daily live out the will of God in his life. He does so because he transforms his mind with the Word of God (Rom. 12:2). By doing this he proves what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Is it Nothing to You When Men Teach That a Direct Operation of the Holy Spirit on the Christian’s Spirit Is Available for Today?

The sword of the Spirit is sufficient to save the soul and to keep it saved.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 The. 2:13).

Inspiration declares that the word of God *effectually worketh* in those who believe. Those who advocate that something more is needed to lift the Christian to a higher level of spirituality (of sanctification) imply Paul

was in error when he stated that the Word of God is effectual. *Effectual* according to Vine's means: "to put forth power, be operative, to work."⁹ Is it effectual in those who believe (faithful Christians) or not? If the Bible cannot be believed here, it cannot be believed anywhere.

When the influence is **effectual**, it is **sufficient** to accomplish the task. James wrote, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16) "Here the meaning may be 'in its inworking,' that is, in the effect produced in the praying man, bringing him into line with the will of God, as in the case of Elijah."¹⁰ *Effectual* praying is sufficient praying. The prayer of the righteous man is able to secure the blessing of God (answer to his prayer).

The righteous man's prayer is effectual since God hears the prayers of the righteous (1 Pet. 3:12). Likewise, when the Bible declares the Word of God is effectual in believers, it means that (when one chooses to continue in the faith) the Word of God enables the believer to secure the blessing of God in the matter of continued forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:7). If one's present car is effectual to take one from point A to point B, then another vehicle is not needed. To understand this point is to appreciate the definition of *effectual*. Today, to think a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the Christian's human spirit is needed (in addition to the revealed Word of God) to receive the continued blessings of God is to deny the effectual nature of the Word given by the Spirit.

In years past in our great brotherhood *faithful* brethren have continued to hold two different views as to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and yet have not allowed such to sever fellowship. This is due to the fact that neither group has claimed a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the human spirit (miraculously or non-miraculously). These two views have been referred to as the *Personal Indwelling View* and the *Representative Indwelling View*. This author holds to the latter view. Many times in discussing the subject of the Holy Spirit a meeting of the minds seems impossible among brethren simply due to: (1) confusion over terms, (2) different levels of Bible knowledge, (3) sometimes an unwillingness to hear one another out, or (4) trusting in one's emotions and feelings over the clear statements of the divine text. However, neither view will cause one to lose his soul.

Paul emphatically states that the Christian is strengthened **by His Spirit** in the inner man. "That he would grant you, according to the riches

of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). While Paul states the **fact** of it, he does not state the **manner** of the Spirit's strengthening. One must study all that the Bible says to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

One cannot prove anything about a subject by a verse that does not discuss that subject. Certain verses on faith teach that faith is necessary to salvation. However, to learn about baptism one must study the passages on baptism. Likewise, all the verses in the New Testament that teach the Christian is strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man only teach the **fact** of His strengthening. To find out **how** He does this strengthening one will be forced to study the verses that discuss such. The power (energy) for Christian living is in the gospel and in believing the facts, obeying the commands, and enjoying the promises found in the glorious, written gospel of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God who has given us that which completely furnishes us unto **every** good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). There is no need for anything more.

To cloud the issue by saying that one's spirit (mind) is strengthened *directly* by the Holy Spirit of God as long as it is *in conjunction with the Word* is still advocating a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, which is unscriptural! To teach that the Holy Spirit **directly** strengthens the Christian's spirit in some *supra-literary* manner is to deny that the written Word of God is the source of Christian faithfulness. One who teaches such should be warned, and hopefully he will change his teaching. However, if he will not repent, he must be marked and avoided. God's command on this matter is clear, unequivocal, and unambiguous. Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

IS IT NOTHING TO ELDERS AND MEMBERS WHEN THEY DO NOT PUT FORTH A REAL EFFORT TO RESTORE THE FALLEN AWAY CHRISTIAN?

All the sin problems in the church (materialism, a fleshly definition of love, the belief that doctrine is not important, the lack of zeal for evangelism) may be traced back to this same problem first exhibited in

the beautiful garden: disrespect of God's authoritative Word (cf., Heb. 13:5-6; 2 John 5-6; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 John 9-11).

All the sin problems in the individual Christian's life (the failure to continue in daily prayer and the failure to study the Bible) means that at some time somebody chose to disrespect what God's Word said and instead **chose** to do what **he** wanted to do instead (cf., Phi. 4:6-7; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Understanding this is the problem, do we really put forth the effort to restore them to the faith? Let us give those who have fallen away reasons for faithfulness in assembling with the saints. Consider 10 reasons for attending worship services regularly and consistently:

1. The Christian should attend regularly to be eager to obey God's command to assemble (Heb. 10:25).
2. We should assemble regularly to show respect for God who gave His Son (John 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).
3. To show respect for Christ who gave his life (John 15:13-14).
4. To show respect for the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-2).
5. To show love and concern for one's brethren. Hebrews 10:24 says to *consider* one another in provoking to love and to good works.
6. To show love and concern for one's own family (1 Tim. 5:8; Eph. 6:4; Eph. 5:23; Mark 8:36).
7. To have a good influence on one's neighbors and the world (Phi. 2:15).
8. To show proper concern for one's own soul (Acts 20:28; 2:42).
9. To show proper appreciation for the divinely appointed pulpit (2 Tim. 4:2).
10. To seek **first** the greatest cause in this life (Mat. 6:33).

IS IT NOTHING TO YOU THAT SOULS ARE LOST AND INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS ARE NOT MISSION MINDED?

The first century church preached the gospel to every creature in their day (Col. 1:6, 23; Rom. 10:18). They did this by understanding the principle of evangelism taught by our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus told His apostles to go make disciples. They were to do that by baptizing and teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded. He had just taught them to go make disciples. The apostles would teach all to repeat this process. This was to continue until every accountable being on earth one

had heard the gospel. Within 31 years this task was accomplished—and without the aid of radio, television, or the internet. First century preachers traveled without the means of jet planes, trains, or cars. These modern day conveniences are beneficial only when we realize that we are the ones who must get out and work. No power of Satan can stop the power of the individual when he/she simply does what he can (Mark 14:8).

When we see a world of over six billion souls (6,050,383,566 individuals as of March 14, 2000)¹¹ do we have the courage to ask: “*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*” If it is something to you, do we have the courage to ask: “What are you doing about it?” When we additionally consider the apostasy which is presently taking place within the ranks of the church of Christ, the few foreign evangelists, the existence of soul-damning, man-made religions (denominationalism), cults, and sectarian groups, may we have the courage and true concern to ask with Jeremiah: “*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*”

In the world today there are approximately 146,615,000 atheists, 353,141,000 Buddhists, 363,334,000 Chinese folk religionists, 1,040,354,000 Roman Catholics, 360,913,000 Protestants, 746,797,000 Hindus (70% Vaishnavites, 25% Shaivites, 2% neo-Hindus and reform Hindus), 1,147,494,000 Muslims and 14,890,000 Jews.¹²

Yet, worldwide there are only about 2,250,000 members of the churches of Christ with approximately 14,000 congregations.¹³ Unfortunately, this number includes liberal churches and *anti* churches. One booklet of 99 pages was produced to list all the *anti* groups worldwide.¹⁴ Truly, there is much error being disseminated by false brethren; therefore we must double our efforts. Is it nothing to you?

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Author unknown; quoted in part.

³Rubel Shelly, “Billy Graham Crusade, June 1-4, 2000 Adelphia Coliseum,” *Lovelines*, Weekly Newsletter of the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Vol. 25, No. 39, Sep 29, 1999.

⁴Rubel Shelly, “HELP WANTED: Can you fog a mirror?” Woodmont Hills Church of Christ.

⁵Email correspondence between Gary Grizzell and Randy Becton; between the dates of May 1, 1998 through May 21, 1998. For information about the Herald of Truth see: <http://www.heraldoftruth.org/new.html> and <http://www.hopeforlife.org/>.

⁶Gary Grizzell, *A Dozen Observations Concerning The Article Entitled: Faith and Knowledge by Hugo McCord* (published on the EGH helps' list, 1999). A copy of this review was mailed to brother McCord. He responded briefly in a letter to the author but chose not to discuss the issue.

⁷*A Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Names*, available from <http://dir.yahoo.com/Reference/Dictionaries/English/>.

⁸Gary L. Grizzell, *If All The Christian Life Is Worship, What Then?* (Cookeville, TN: Tracts For The Nations, Feb 1999).

⁹W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, n.d.), p. 194. Also, *effectual* is found in 2 Cor. 1:6 and Gal. 2:8.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Data Base Note: Data updated 12-29-99; World POPClock Projection; available from <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/popclockw>.

¹²*THE WORLD ALMANAC and BOOK OF FACTS 1999*; available from <http://almanac.webdata.com/religion/religion05.htm>. Copyright © 1998 by PRIMEDIA Reference Inc. A PRIMEDIA Company. All Rights Reserved.

¹³*1998 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, copyright National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; World Almanac research; available from <http://www.woodmont.org/whlandmr.html>.

¹⁴*Guardian of Truth Directory of Churches of Christ* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1996).

ELDERS FEEDING THEMSELVES

EZEKIEL 34:2

Carl Garner



Carl Garner has been a gospel preacher since 1954. He attended Abilene Christian College (BS, Education) and North Texas State University (Master of Education, Public School Administration). He is married to Janice (Sowards) of Fort Worth, Texas, and they have two children and five grandchildren.

Carl taught in the Fort Worth, Texas, public schools; Navarro Junior College, Corsicana, Texas; Director of the McCarty Student Center and instructor at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. He has been the local preacher for the Dripping Springs Church of Christ, Dripping Springs, Texas, since 1986, and has served as an elder with the congregation since 1991. Carl has been an instructor at Southwest

School of Bible Studies, Austin, Texas, since 1987, and director of the Northern New England Lectures since 1996.

INTRODUCTION

“Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe *be* to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” (Eze. 34:2).¹

The shepherd has been an integral part of the lifestyle of Israel since before they became a nation. Those shepherds who roamed the hillsides of Judea, Manasseh, and Naphtali served in a profession that would become a metaphor for God’s ideal in leadership. Unfortunately, the same metaphor is also used to show the lowest and most degrading of attitudes in the area of leadership. Few can think of the Scriptures without recalling the shepherd’s psalm, the 23rd. Abraham was a shepherd, as was David, “a man after his own heart,” (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). But Jesus also warned of the shepherd whose heart was not in his work, calling him an *hireling* (John 10:12-13).

The relationship of shepherd to sheep is a remarkable one, in that the closest and most diligent care must be utilized in providing them protection and sustenance. The shepherd knew his sheep, often by name. He was willing to lay down his life for his flock, and those under his charge looked to him for that very care. The flock knew the voice of their

shepherd and would not follow another. The shepherd's tools were so fashioned that their function was in harmony with their purpose. The rod and the staff not only kept the wandering lamb from going too far away, but they could be used as a weapon against the predator. At night the shepherd lay in the *door* of the sheepfold, being the first line of defense against any intruder. He led them to places where grazing would be sufficient, and he guided them to proper shelter for their safety.

Some of these qualities are mentioned specifically in Jesus' discussion of "the good shepherd" in John 10. Others are commonly mentioned as being inherent in the relationship between sheep and shepherd. It is hardly a surprise that our Father chose this term to describe the work of His *shepherds* in caring for the church as their overseers. To some degree each quality of the ancient shepherd's care for the flock is similar to the care intended to be provided by elders/ bishops/pastors of God's flock today. It is also to be expected that when God dealt with *shepherds* who were not diligent, did not protect their flock, did not provide them with sufficient spiritual nourishment, and did not watch over them as they should, that their punishment would be fitting to their negligence and their reproach.

EZEKIEL'S SAD STATEMENT

Under the circumstances, Ezekiel's rebuke of Israel's shepherds is to be expected. They had so neglected their duties that those under their charge were now in captivity to Israel's hated enemy. What his impeachment included was tantamount to placing blame upon the leadership of Israel for their present captivity. Though they had the obligation to protect, guide, and nourish the nation and the people of God, they had, either by neglect or with malice and self-serving actions, brought that same nation to their knees. They were accused of providing for themselves, but neglecting their primary charge. They had *fed* themselves, but had left their flock to the wolves and to their own devices. No greater accusation can be brought against any leader or group of leaders. In something akin to military terms, they had "fallen asleep on their watch," and just as Ezekiel had written in chapter 3, they were directly responsible for the demise of their countrymen.

And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my

mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul (Eze. 3:16-21).

The Specific Charges

We want briefly to examine the charges made against the shepherds of Israel, but the bulk of our attention will be given to the application implied by the use of similar terms in the New Testament as directed toward the *shepherds* or elders of local congregations even “unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Unfortunately, the neglect of Israel’s shepherds is still found in those appointed as shepherds of Christ’s flock today. If we can learn from Ezekiel’s charge to the shepherds of old, perhaps we can avoid the shame and loss that eventuated from that of Israel.

They had been to their flock as a *hireling*.

Shepherds on the hillsides in Judea were responsible for the physical welfare of their sheep. In the terms Jesus used, however, they were the *hirelings* who sought to enrich themselves and provide for their own needs before and to the exclusion of their flock. They “eat the flock”; they fed themselves and indulged their own appetites without giving sufficient attention to the needs of their flock. This was a very serious charge, for the flock was to be their first responsibility. They were not ashamed to wear the garments of wool taken from the flock, but God asked them:

Woe *be* to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: *but* ye feed not the flock (Eze. 34:2-3).

Certainly, the shepherd had a responsibility toward his family, his behavior, his character (1 Tim. 3:4-5, Tit. 1:10), but not to the neglect of the responsibility to the flock. In short, their love for and interest in those in their charge should have prevented their selfish attitude toward others.

The diseased and broken under their care had not been strengthened or healed.

Again, those in their care who were weakened by lack of attention or by their own neglect needed to receive that attention. Those with wounds needed to be “bound up,” but instead they were left to tend to themselves. The flock were either too weak to care for themselves or did not know how to bind their own wounds.

Sheep that were *driven away and lost* had not been *sought or brought again*.

It was easy for a lamb to drift away or to be driven away by a predator or even another sheep in his own flock. When away from their peers they were also away from their needed protection, nourishment, and care. They were easy prey to wolves or other wild beasts, and they might also be taken into another flock and have become the property of another. Instead of seeking them out with a shepherd’s care, the shepherd had treated them shamefully.

The flock had been ruled with *force and cruelty*.

A sheep is generally a benign creature and often not capable of ruling his own ways. They needed and welcomed the leadership of the shepherd. Naively, they assumed the shepherd would look out for their best interests, and they followed without fear. That is the nature of a sheep. The shepherd’s cunning could be turned against the sheep, however, and they could be intimidated. If a shepherd used harshness and violent methods, they were seldom able to protect themselves from that treatment. Consequently, their ill treatment was forced upon them.

They had been scattered and broken on the heights of the Judean hills and ravines.

It was as though they had **no shepherd**, for they had to fend for themselves. Israel, once a prince among nations, now lay captive to Babylon and the hordes of heathenism. It had been necessary for the sheep to seek out their own food, for their shepherds were *feathering*

their own nest. In their searching for sustenance, the sheep chanced upon dangerous places, the steep precipice, and the deep ravine. They wandered aimlessly throughout the land in search of food and shelter, but instead often found starvation, injury, and death. They served as the food for every possible predator, for they were neither fed nor protected from their enemy.

“None did search after them.”

When Jesus told the parable of the “lost sheep” in Luke 15:1-7, the key to this narrative is that the shepherd would seek out and *search* for those who were lost. Of course, Jesus Himself had said that His mission on earth was to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). So when the shepherds of Israel just let their sheep go and did not even try to find and bring them back, they were in violation of the very mandate given to them. In different forms, this accusation is mentioned at least four times in Ezekiel’s charges against them. The lost and wandering sheep needed to be searched for, sought after, and brought back to the fold of safety. The shepherds of Israel did not do so.

The Results of the Shepherds’ Neglect

At the conclusion of the text containing these charges, Ezekiel states that God will “require my flock at their hand.” Those here referred to as shepherds included kings, priests, elders of the people, princes, magistrates, and others in positions of leadership, both corporate and local. God is saying that the *scattered*, or captive sheep, the broken, the wounded, the violated would be evidence for the guilt of those leaders. Those who had been derelict would *give account* for their leadership and their dereliction of duty. They, therefore, would have to face God’s judgment regarding the ill-treatment of His children.

GOD’S SHEPHERDS TODAY

It is no coincidence that *shepherd* is so familiar to a student of the New Testament. It is also not surprising to find that God still uses this metaphor to describe those who provide care and oversight for His sheep today. The care needed by sheep in the field is very similar to the care and guidance needed by His flock today, the church of Christ. It was a daunting task to serve as a shepherd, either literally or metaphorically as used in Ezekiel’s writing. It was a full time job, and the burden of

feeding, protecting, and guiding a flock of sheep then and now can be a stressful and tiring responsibility.

So it is with those who are elders/bishops/shepherds in the church. It is a task that no one can really comprehend until they face it for themselves. It has been this author's privilege to work with many different elders over the forty-five years that he has preached. For the most part, they were and are good and earnest men who truly love God and are dedicated to their responsibilities. This writer does not deny that there have been those who were less diligent than they should have been, but the work of an elder of the church is such that even the best of men are going to fall short far too often.

About ten years ago, this writer was appointed to serve in that office in Dripping Springs. How can anyone be sure they are prepared for the task or as qualified as they should be? Now, these years later, this scribe realizes just how difficult that task can be. Hebrews 13:17 is always in the back of shepherds' minds as we meet together and seek to do our best. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you."

If elders fully understand the import of these words, we know that the spiritual health of the congregation and that of each member of the congregation is, to some degree, placed upon our shoulders.

It is imperative that we note the two-fold obligation in association with this task. First, there is the mandate to each member, including elders and preachers, that all be in subjection to the authority of those who serve as our shepherds. Second, there is the duty and accountability of each shepherd that must be understood. Today's shepherds are held accountable to the "chief shepherd" in much the same fashion as were the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34.

Much has been written and said in recent years regarding the authority of elders. Suffice it to say at this point that God **has** given the authority necessary (to those divinely qualified and duly appointed) to perform the task given to them. To do otherwise would be to place a responsibility upon a body of men, to place them in a position of accountability, yet withhold from them the authority necessary to fulfill that responsibility. To do so would violate the wisdom, justice, love, and mercy of God in His dealing with His shepherds.

With those thoughts in mind, we now look to the analogy of the sheep-to-shepherd and shepherd-to-sheep relationship today. It is not at all difficult to see the possibility of the same neglect and the same dereliction of duty being applied to the shepherd/overseer of the church today. Nothing is to be gained by belittling the work of the preacher/evangelist in the local church as we seek to establish the work of the shepherds. True, the preacher(s) has a daunting task as well and will also be held accountable for his efforts. But the responsibility of feeding and tending the flock of God today is placed upon elders, not preachers. The familiar words of Paul to the shepherds of the church at Ephesus give us instruction in this matter.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:26-32).

Notice the use of that “shepherd...flock” relationship throughout these verses. The “flock...overseers...feed the church...grievous wolves...not sparing the flock” are clearly recognized. It is obvious, therefore, that many of the same obligations of the shepherd to the sheep in Old Testament times are still in effect. Such also requires today’s shepherds to be under similar obligation. The task of *feeding* the flock is placed upon the shepherds, who may commission preachers, teachers, etc., as their means of fulfilling that work. “Feed” in Acts 20:28 is *poimaino* from *poimen*, both of which are translated by terms associated with sheep, shepherds, pastors, tending, and caring for flocks. It is also translated “feed” in 1 Peter 5:2, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*.”

In investigating the negligent behavior of the shepherds of Israel, we may also see how today’s shepherds may be equally derelict. It is hard to quarrel with the obvious: it is a fact that many congregations today

are as “sheep without a shepherd.” Many do not have elders at all, and some of those who have been appointed/ordained are not truly qualified by Bible standards. Those who are qualified often find themselves facing more work than it seems a human can accomplish. Frustration and apathy often go together, effectively rendering an eldership no more than a board of directors or committee attempting to accomplish the work deacons are supposed to do anyway. There is no way to determine the *reason* for the lack of oversight and care that is prevalent in so many congregations today. Each group of elders will likely be influenced by different problems and obstacles, but some problems seem to be common to most situations, including the following:

Shepherds appointed are not biblically qualified.

It is true that this can be described as the main reason that shepherds are ineffective, for if they are truly qualified, the remaining problems will not deter them from keeping faith with their appointed task. It is appropriate, however, for us to note briefly that when we *appoint* men to serve as shepherds who are not qualified as God has instructed, the flock is in grave danger.

Unfortunately, some have been chosen because of personality, kinfolk, reputation, business skills, and factors other than biblical qualifications. Many of these are good men, even the very best of men. But, without sufficient Bible knowledge and the accompanying steadfastness required, they are not what is needed in the local church. *Each* man must possess *each* qualification (see 1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1) to a marked degree, to the extent that he will be willing and able to do what a shepherd is required to do. If a shepherd does not *desire the office of a bishop*, and is not *sober* or *vigilant*, the work will not be carried out. The flock will wander in the hills seeking food, asking for guidance. Such guidance will be found, but probably not in the direction demanded by the occasion. A flock of sheep without a shepherd’s care is easy prey for the *wolves* who seek to devour them.

This being the case, it is imperative that we study with great care what God has given as qualities required in His shepherds and appoint only those who have such qualities to the degree that they can serve capably in this honored work.

Ignorance of the Bible.

Paul told Titus that elders of the church of Jesus Christ should be capable of putting to silence those who would seek to destroy God's flock.

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision (Tit. 1:9-10).

Note that these shepherds must have the ability to “**exhort** and to **convince** [that is, to refute, convict, confute, prove false]” those who would violate the sanctity of God's authority. But, if the knowledge of God's Word is not in these men, there will be no stopping the *gainsayers*. That which puts a stop to false teachers must be truth. God's truth, not merely the elders' “say-so.”

Note also that ignorance of Scripture cripples both the individual shepherd as well as the body of shepherds. When one is unskilled in that area, he may serve as a *brake* on the progress of the eldership as a whole. He cannot be capable of leading others in areas where he does not have the knowledge necessary for such leadership. Instead, he becomes a source of contention for those who are knowledgeable, and valuable time and energy is expended in overcoming the lack of qualification of one who should be qualified.

A lack of conviction and motivation to fulfill their God-ordained roles shepherds.

A man may have the physical, external qualifications (family, age, character in community, etc.), yet never truly take “the oversight *thereof*” (1 Pet. 5:2). I have known those who otherwise *could have been* excellent shepherds of the Lord's flock, but either did not *know* what they were to do, or were *not willing* to invest the time and effort needed to take that oversight when they found out what they must do. This merely compounds the problem: *elders* without knowledge, courage, or determination to do what they were appointed to do. When a congregation is *led* by such men, it cannot be a surprise to discover that the flock does not find the needed spiritual nourishment or the needed warnings of the dangers of wolves and tainted food. One unqualified and unwilling shepherd is one too many in any flock!

Improper attitudes toward the authority inherent in the work of the shepherd.

There have been some who claimed elders have *no* authority, and there are those who would like for elders to be in the position of God Himself, giving orders and being accountable to no one. Conversations with former students in the field have confirmed that some elders make their *decisions* with an attitude that indicates they believe they have authority both in legislative as well as expedient matters. In defending those decisions, they may be as likely to refer to their *authority* as to the Scripture which should be the basis of all authority. Elders who view themselves as the source of power will never be the shepherds God intended for His flock.

Unwillingness to give sufficient time to the task of shepherding the flock.

There is no excuse for the shepherd to refuse to give sufficient time to this work. It is dereliction of duty in its most abhorrent form. If a man is unwilling to invest that time, he should not be appointed, or, having been appointed, should either change his ways or resign his post.

But it also must be noted that a tremendous amount of time is demanded in the oversight of a congregation of any size. To be fair, many shepherds are trying to feed their family as well as the flock of God. Their hours *are* limited: limited by a task that God has declared to be a noble one, that of providing for their family (1 Tim. 5:8). In some cases, elders are found doing the work that deacons should be doing, thereby robbing them of the time so desperately needed in overseeing the flock. Correcting that situation could remove part of this problem.

Perhaps in our studies we have overlooked the fact that the context previously referenced states: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).

Honour is from *time*, which often has the force of “remuneration, price, honorarium” (see 1 Cor. 6:20; Rom. 13:7; Acts 19:19). Perhaps we have been too slow to give consideration to what has been somewhat scornfully referred to as the *paid elder*. This is not always necessary, but the *laborer* is worthy of his hire, and it could be helpful to the fulfilling of the imperatives of the work. It cannot be denied that the shepherd with a family (and should there be any other kind?) is under a significant time

restraint. The task is enormous, both in responsibility and time, and while that is no excuse for failing to do the work, it is a factor to be considered. There are other ways that may be more cost-effective, but the restraints of time can be daunting.

Lording over the flock.

When Peter discussed the work of shepherds, he made it clear that while those who serve in that position do have the authority to take “the oversight thereof,” they must not seek to be “lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Such a tendency should be screened out during the process of appointing the shepherds, for Scripture demands that they be “blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry” (Tit. 1:7). Some may be overcome by the apparent *power* incumbent in the office of bishop, but truly qualified men will realize that they lead by example, not by power. They lead by a “thus saith the Lord,” not a “thus saith the elder.” The flock will follow the shepherd when they have respect for them as *shepherds*. When sheep are *driven* instead of *led*, rebellion may be the ultimate outcome. Again, this point does not remove from the elders the authority necessary to *oversee*, but it does remove the motivation of power. It is exceedingly sad when those who should be shepherds determine they will be *kings* and *rulers*. Such often leads to circumstances when these *lords* begin to loose where God has not loosed, and to bind where God has not bound, all because they have lost sight of the fact that they have not been endowed with that kind of authority. When elders/shepherds view themselves as *lords*, they may very well dismiss the prompting of Jeremiah 6:16:

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*.

They may decide that such principles are outmoded, and that anything that may be construed as *old* will not succeed in this century. They then begin to drift away from the seeking of a “thus saith the Lord” to an attitude that suggests, “a new century demands new ways to do new things, or we cannot be shackled to the past, nor can we be prevented from seeking new and better ways than that of primitive times.” In such situations the sheep, trusting the genuineness of the fervor of their

shepherds, are often devoured by the wolves that have already fed on this mind-set. Tragically, that group of Christians are on the path that leads to destruction, both spiritually and physically.

Sheep who are not sober and vigilant.

It would be a mistake to place all of the blame upon the shepherds when a flock is devoured by wolves. The analogy of the sheep/shepherd relationship may be weak at this point, for the sheep in God's flock are not only capable of thought and reason, but they must be willing to search "the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

As a preacher, this writer has given this context as a mandate that my brethren must not accept my words without properly comparing them with the Scriptures. This author will not cease to do that, and it should be made clear that a similar obligation rests upon every Christian to be *vigilant* and *sober* (Tit. 2:2-6; 1 Pet. 5:8) in their contemplation of their circumstances. A literal sheep may blindly follow his shepherd wherever he is led, but a Christian is to use his/her ability to reason, and to search the Scriptures daily that they are not led into dangerous paths or faith-threatening situations.

It is worthy of note that two specific forms of obligation are given to Christians. The shepherds must lead in paths of righteousness, for if they do not, they "must give account" (Heb. 13:17). However, it will not do for the Christian to think they can lay blame on their shepherds for their own lack of diligence, watchfulness, or sober thinking. Israel drifted away from Jehovah, partly because their leaders took them in that direction. But each individual must take responsibility for his/her own soul, and must be constantly alert to the *devices* of Satan that may be brought to bear upon them. Both Israel **and** her shepherds were at fault in going into idolatry, and both were given appropriate punishment for so doing.

Every Christian has the responsibility to watch for his/her own soul as well as the *soul* of the local congregation in which they labor. This may bring upon them the wrath of those whose negligent oversight have precipitated their drifting away from the "old paths" of God, but that is just one of the costs of being a Christian (see Luke 14:25-33).

How Can We Solve this Problem Today?

This writer determined at the beginning of this composition that he would not use this means as an opportunity to castigate those who serve as elders/bishops/shepherds. Personally, he was somewhat dismayed at the antagonism that seems to exist between preachers and elders when appointed to serve about ten years ago. Some preachers for whom this author has great respect were quick to joke about the “double-minded” man that he, as a preacher/elder, must now possess. More than one said, “Now you are your own worst enemy.” This scribe realizes that much of that was in jest, and all those who said those things did not have bad attitudes toward elders in general. But in my years of preaching this writer has heard much more of that than is necessary, and such *jokes* cannot come forth without some underlying mind-set toward those who oversee the church. If there were ever men who should have the highest regard for each other, it should be those who oversee and those who are their instrument for the feeding of the flock. Elders of the Lord’s church owe much to those who preach the pure, unvarnished truth of God. Preachers must also realize that godly elders are the very backbone of any and every faithful congregation everywhere. Fighting and enmity between these brethren can lead only to division, rancor, and ineffective churches. This author has known preachers who were the source of strife in a congregation, who could be regarded as anything but the friend of God. Likewise, he has known shepherds of the flock who were either lazy and apathetic, or were power-seekers. These definitely have been the exception and not the rule. This writer would like to submit some possible solutions to the problems faced by Israel of old (and that God’s flock continues to face today). He intends them to be given humbly, honestly, and plainly, knowing that he cannot know every situation. We should all know this: To ignore the problem is *not* a solution, to exaggerate the problem is *not* a solution, to place blame indiscriminately is *not* the solution, to deny that such a problem exists is *not* a solution. But there *are* some solutions, and many can be seen in the consideration of the problems themselves as seen above. The following suggestions are intended to help all and hurt none, and for us to avoid the manner of wickedness discussed in the days of Ezekiel.

A Congregation Filled with Biblically Literate Members.

An obvious beginning would be for every Christian in every congregation of God's people to determine they will study their Bible to the end that they may know exactly what God's will is for His church. In so doing we shall not only have a scripturally educated constituency, but we will also have a source for godly elders and elder's wives for the years to come. Also, when time comes to *ordain* elders in any/every church (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5), we will know and honor the qualifications set forth in God's Book of Truth.

Good Examples from Parents

Parents need to exhibit the utmost respect for every godly elder/shepherd of the local church. Hebrews 13:17 says this would eventuate in the shepherd's work being done **“with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”** The old cliché, “Little pitchers have big ears,” is still true in many ways. When Mom and Dad speak with disrespect about the shepherds of the church, their children will not forget that attitude and those words spoken by their parents. The children of parents who are constant critics of elders, preachers, deacons, etc., can be expected to exhibit problems with their faith, even to doubting all they have been taught. Those who do not abandon the Lord altogether are very likely to possess a similar attitude toward those who serve in a similar capacity when they are adults, thereby causing similar problems at that time.

Solving the “Time Problem”

There is nothing we can do about the restraints of time, for there will always be the same number of hours in a day. Obviously, the solution must come within the framework of how we use the time allotted us. Prioritizing our responsibilities will be necessary, for some things are more important to God than others. In looking back to Ezekiel 34:4-6 we should notice that mundane matters are not mentioned, but matters that related to souls and to spiritual health are mentioned prominently. Note the following excerpts from that context and note the things that mattered to God:

The diseased have ye not strengthened...neither have ye bound up *that which was broken*...neither have ye sought that which was lost...with cruelty have ye ruled them...they were scattered, because *there is no*

shepherd...my flock was scattered...and none did search or seek *after them*.

Mending the fences, searching for food, sharpening the rod, and smoothing the staff were important to a shepherd, but more important were the spiritual needs of Israel. So it is today, and if time restraints press today's shepherds, let someone else sharpen the rod and smooth the staff while the shepherds strengthen, bind up the wounded, find that which is lost, and search and seek after those who are scattered and broken.

Easy solutions? None were promised then nor now, for each problem demands a different solution, and each lamb requires a different kind of care. Shepherds must not allow time restraints to keep them from doing that which is most important.

Stiffen the Backbone of God's Shepherds.

Even good men can become apathetic when it comes to dealing with church troubles. But those same men **can** be strengthened, **can** be motivated to a more sober consideration of the task given them. If it is necessary for us to exhort the weak and the spiritually lame, it is also imperative that elders be exhorted to be "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," and "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 15:58; 16:13).

The fact that an elder becomes frustrated and stressful in his work as a shepherd does not automatically disqualify him to serve in that capacity. Paul and Peter alike spoke words of warning and exhortation to the shepherds of God's flock, for they are especially in need of them. When we find elders who are less than what they can and should be, all of us can hold up their hands, give support to them, and make it clear that they will have our support every time they seek to do what is right in the sight of God. Do not reject them until every effort to strengthen and encourage them has been exhausted.

Educate Every Christian Concerning the Elders' Authority.

The work of elders/shepherds will never be very effective as long as some refuse to

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they

may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

It is not unusual for some to write their own rules and decide for themselves which of the decisions of the elders they will support and which they will reject. We probably pray too often for the *decisions* of the elders and not enough for the hours of pondering the works and efforts needed to keep the church on the right path. Elders do not merely sit in meetings *making decisions*, but formulating the means by which the gospel can be taken to all. Most shepherds have no desire to possess power, but there is a degree of power in the considerations made by elders when some matter of expediency arises. Some will prefer to meet a 9:00 A.M. while others would prefer 9:30. But someone must *decide* when to meet, for that is necessary for good organization. Someone must choose in expedient matters, and God chose elders to do so. They will never have legislative authority, for the *rules* have already been made by Jehovah Himself. But when duly ordained and qualified shepherds do make a *decision*, others must be willing to submit to these choices, knowing that ultimately such is in the best interests of all.

Accept Responsibility for Your Actions.

The fault did not all rest in the arms of the shepherds of Israel, and the same is true today. God's people today must be willing to continue to grow, to become stronger in the Lord's kingdom, and to take responsibility for their deeds. You and I can read the Scriptures and see what is demanded of us. We can attend each class available to us, and we can do what it takes to grow and mature in the faith. We can make sure that what is preached from the pulpit and taught in the classroom is always sound and healthy, as demanded by the Scriptures themselves. We can be astute enough to see the direction our local congregation is taking, and must be willing to do our part in keeping it on the right track. That does not require an ugly attitude or a trouble-makers demeanor, for such would in itself be sinful. But we must be willing to make sure that what **we** stand for is what **God** stands for and demands. Each Christian can do that, and when we do, we will be able to see that such a situation as that will be "profitable to you."

CONCLUSION

The line between faithful, godly elders and those who are hirelings is sometimes a frail and seemingly insignificant one. The elders of Israel

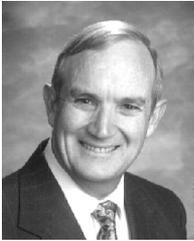
were not necessarily *evil* in the sense of moral behavior, but in the sense that they did not fulfill their obligations. I say *seemingly* insignificant, but in reality it is truly an enormous one. The church is in desperate need of men who will “fill the gap” of neglected leadership. Such leadership does not just magically appear on the scene, but only with planning, preparation, and deep convictions. Every congregation must be resolute in its determination to be and to remain faithful to the mandate of being God’s people. Until that resolve reigns, each person and each congregation will be the willing prey of false teachers and eternal damnation. It is just that serious. It is a sad story, but Ezekiel 34:1-16 should be read to every congregation on a regular basis, reminding the shepherds and the sheep of the enormity of their responsibility to God, to the flock, and to the shepherds of the flock.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES, AND...FOUND WANTING” DANIEL 5:25-27

Curtis A. Cates



Curtis A. Cates is the son of a gospel preacher and has been preaching for over thirty years. For over twenty years, he has been engaged in training preachers. He also has a son who preaches.

He has degrees in Bible, English, Science, History, and Education from Alabama Christian College, Livingston University, and Samford University. He holds the Master of Theology degree from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Education from the University of Alabama. He has done post-doctoral work at Abilene Christian University.

Curtis has served as Professor of Bible and English, Alabama Christian College; Vice President of Academics, Southern Christian University; and, Dean of the College, Columbia Christian College (Portland, Oregon). He has been Director of the Memphis School of Preaching for the last twelve years and continues to teach on the adjunct faculty in Bible and apologetics, Southern Christian University.

He speaks in gospel meetings, lectureships, and mission efforts including Southeast Asia. He has authored several tracts, numerous articles, and *The Second Incarnation—A Pattern For Apostasy and Worship: Heaven's Imperative, Or Man's Innovations?* He edits *Yokefellow* and the Memphis School of Preaching lectureship books.

He is married to Annette Bingham Cates, and they have two children: Curtis A., Jr., and Daniel Frazier.

The theme of this lectureship is unique and very timely. The greatest, most noted statements ever to grace the lips of man are to be found in God's Word. Those persons of honest and good hearts and of a mind to submit to God's will and to glorify Him are by those profound utterances stirred within to live right, to draw nearer to the Father, and to lead others in the way of salvation.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most sobering, thought-provoking, soul-searching statements in all of Holy Writ is found in Daniel 5:25-28,

And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end; TEKEL; thou art

weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.¹

This startling message of impending, imminent doom—MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN—was written by the finger of God on a white plastered wall of King Belshazzar's palace, and it spelled the king's death, the end of his reign, and the destruction of his empire. It also announced the eternal ruin of his soul. Being that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4), there are many powerful lessons to be gleaned from a study of the background and the biblical account of the sad historical events which lead to the ominous, foreboding writing on the wall.

THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

The book of Daniel speaks of four world empires: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman. The events of our study take place on the Babylonian Empire's last night of existence. It had lasted some seventy years, having come to power with the destruction of the Assyrian Empire and the fall of Nineveh, where its great king sat. The first king of Babylon was Nebuchadnezzar (He and his father, Nabopolassar, were co-regents for several years). After the mop-up campaign against Haran and Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar fought against Jerusalem (the nation of Judah), resulting in three carryings away. In 605 B.C., the seed royal (including Daniel) were taken to Babylon, along with many of the vessels of God's temple (Dan. 1:1-3). In 597 B.C., Ezekiel the priest (and prophet) as well as the skilled artisans were carried away; Nebuchadnezzar did not want them making weapons of defense. In 586 B.C., the city of Jerusalem was destroyed: its walls and God's temple were razed to the ground, and its captives were transported to Babylon.

The Babylonian Empire had the following kings: Nebuchadnezzar, 43 years; Evil-merodach, son of Nebuchadnezzar, 2½ years; Neriglissor, who married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter and who assassinated Evil-merodach, 3-3½ years; Laborosoarchod, son of Neriglissor, 9 months; and Nabonidus, 16 years (for a total time of their reigns, 66 years). Beginning the reign of Nebuchadnezzar at approximately 605 B.C., the events in Daniel 5 (under discussion) would be transpiring at 539 or early 538 B.C.

Belshazzar, the king of Babylon chronicled in Daniel 5, was co-regent with his father Nabonidus. Archaeology has unearthed records verifying

this relationship, even producing some official documents signed/sealed by both father and son. Nabonidus was very often out of the city; he was very religious (an idolater). His bringing other nations' and people's idols into the city would anger the priests of Marduk, the god of Babylon. Interestingly, he was away during the events of this night of terror, perhaps even already having been captured by Cyrus the Persian. It is amazing how the spade is the handmaid of the Bible, bearing out its historicity and accuracy, as is very clear in the events recorded by Daniel.

THE DRUNKEN, BLASPHEMOUS FEAST

Daniel accurately records in Daniel 5:1-4 (he was present later in the events and saw the debauchery; he was also inspired by God!) that Belshazzar "made a great feast," perhaps starting off as any other feast with his most able, trusted leaders, or lords, in the empire, a thousand of them. There was drinking; he became intoxicated (note the root of that word, *toxic*; he became poisoned) on this special occasion; most of the time, he would not have such a feast with his lords. As he became more inebriated, he got more emboldened. He had his wives and concubines brought into the feast (evidently they were not present at the start); perhaps he wished to furnish the added thrill of placing his harem on exhibit, as had King Ahasuerus, in Esther 1:9-12. The modest Vashti, to her credit, refused to submit to such indecency. His drunkenness being greatly exacerbated, he moved even to commanding that the golden and silver vessels which had been dedicated for service in the holy places of Jehovah's temple (which had been removed to Babylon by "Nebuchadnezzar his father") be brought so that "the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank from them," which they did. Becoming still more emboldened, Belshazzar and the others "drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

It was tremendous insolence for Belshazzar to drink out of the vessels dedicated to God's service, highly insulting and arrogant. Likely, he was gloating over his grandfather's successes over the Jews, his having captured them and having destroyed their city and the temple of Jehovah. (Though called Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar was actually his grandfather. This is not unusual among the Hebrews, simply indicating an ancestor. See also Luke 1:32, where "the Lord God shall give unto him [Christ] the throne of his **father** David"; cf., Mat. 22:42.) It was absolute blasphemy for the vessels dedicated to God's service to be used

to praise their own idols; this insult to God was likely combined with debauchery and immorality. What a defiant and enbrazen challenge to the true and holy Creator and to His memorial Name!

THE FINGERS WRITE ON THE WALL

Daniel reveals that out of the darkness came the fingers of a man's hand and wrote on the plaster (Dan. 5:5-9). We remember reading how that with His finger, God earlier wrote on the two tables of stone, the ten commandments (Exo. 31:18). That happened the "same hour" as the feast; all of a sudden when least expected, the boasting immediately stopped! The walls which often announced the King's triumphs now told of his disastrous defeat; the billboard was white, illuminated by bright candlelight for all to see, especially Belshazzar.

The king fell apart: the heretofore confident king was now trembling; his brightness, or countenance, was changed to alarm and shock. His commanding had now been transformed into begging; he was out of control from backbone to ankles, and his knees smote together. He cried out in desperation. He had experienced the supernatural, and he likely was stricken with guilt. He called for the "wise men" (by earthly standard), the enchanters, astrologers, et al. Isaiah foresaw this sad event nearly 200 years earlier:

Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast labored from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from the things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before. Thus shall the things be unto thee wherein thou hast labored: they that have trafficked with thee from thy youth shall wander every one to his quarter; there shall be none to save thee (Isa. 47:12-15).

There is "no God else besides me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides me" (Isa. 45:21). Those Babylonian kings were ever calling upon their impotent idols—to no avail and to their own shame. Should not Belshazzar have learned from his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar? But, call upon the astrologers he did, even offering "third ruler in the kingdom" if they could "read this writing, and show me [him] the interpretation thereof." To expect them to do such was folly; the idols and the soothsayers were exposed as nothing. In times of such emergency, trusting in

man, in atheistic humanism, in astrology brings the darkest despair. (Belshazzar offered the purple robe and the medallion of gold, but why not second ruler? It was because that his father, Nabonidus, was first and he, Belshazzar, was second. Third was the highest he could offer.)

THE PROPHET DANIEL IS BROUGHT BEFORE AND ANSWERS BELSHAZZAR

Daniel records that the queen learned of the dilemma and made her way into the banqueting house. She was not a wife of Belshazzar, because his wives and concubines had been engaged in the debauchery. She was queen mother, likely the widow of Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather. She would therefore have known of and remembered Nebuchadnezzar's experiences with Daniel's God, as recorded in Daniel 2, 3, and 4. Nebuchadnezzar evidently died a believer (4:37). She would be held in high esteem (5:10-12).

The queen mother extended the king a greeting of honor, after which she assured Belshazzar that a man was in his kingdom "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods" and who demonstrated what she termed "the wisdom of the gods." Of course, "the gods" (idols) have no wisdom; Daniel had by inspiration wisdom given him by Jehovah. Nebuchadnezzar exalted him "chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan. 2:48), "master of the magicians," et al. This person's name was Daniel, she related, "whom the king named Belteshazzar." (There is something in a name; consequently, Nebuchadnezzar had changed the names of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, God-fearing and honoring names, to names honoring idols.)

Why would not Daniel have been called in with the astrologers or have been thought of by Belshazzar? By now, Daniel is approximately eighty-four years old. In addition, the dynasty in which he was in a place of authority would have changed when Neriglissar assassinated Evil-merodach. With a change in dynasty would go a change of officials. So, Daniel had to be sought (Dan. 5:13-16), having years before been moved into the background..

Belshazzar asked Daniel if he was the one whom Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather, brought from Judah into Babylon. He conveyed to Daniel that he had heard of him and of his wisdom, but he had evidently never met Daniel. He then told Daniel of his wise men having been unable to read the writing on the wall and make known the meaning. He told of

having heard that Daniel could "give interpretations, and dissolve doubts." He made the same offer to Daniel, which he had offered his wise men—purple, royal robe, gold medallion, and third ruler in the kingdom. Though not closely familiar with him, Belshazzar was desperate.

THE RESPONSE OF DANIEL

Daniel was not interested in Belshazzar's offer. He was God's spokesman; that was his motivation, not position or prestige. And, what did Belshazzar have to give, anyway? The enemy was at the gate; Darius had been preparing for months to take the city. The preparations had already been made to divert the River Euphrates, which went through the city under the walls; the water was already diverted, and the army was in the process of entering through the dry river bed. Of course, Belshazzar was unconcerned about the threat from without; the walls would hold out any enemy for not months but years, he thought. However, Daniel would reveal to the king the divine message (Dan. 5:17-24).

He began by reminding Belshazzar of God's having made his grandfather a powerful monarch, before whom peoples from many dialects and nations bowed. He was a powerful, blood-thirsty ruler (cf., Dan. 3-4), putting down and raising up at will. However, Nebuchadnezzar was haughty and prideful, leading to God's removal of him from the throne through seven years of insanity. He went out and ate grass like oxen, living away from people in the wilderness and not knowing to get out of the rain, the purpose of which was to humble him to acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God (Dan. 4:31-33). When he was again blessed with his sanity and his kingdom, he did acknowledge the Most High God, sending a royal message throughout his realm to that effect (Dan. 4:1-3); he now extolled and honored his Creator (Dan. 4:37), having humbled his heart before God.

The message to Belshazzar was this: he had **not** learned from his grandfather's experiences, "though thou knewest all this" (Dan. 5:22). In fact, the opposite was the case; as bad as Nebuchadnezzar had been, he had never so profaned the vessels of Jehovah and blasphemed as did Belshazzar, his wives and concubines, and his lords, even using them to praise the idols, "which see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not

glorified” (Dan. 5:23). God would not tolerate such insolence, thus His writing on the wall.

THE WRITING READ AND INTERPRETED

Whereas the intellectuals of Babylon could not discern God’s message, the inspired prophet could explain it. MENE, MENE, repeated for emphasis, meant “to number,” “to set a limit.” Its interpretation was, “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end” (Dan. 5:25-28). As prophesied to Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon would be destroyed, the pieces of which would be ruled by others (Dan. 2:39); in fact, the enemy was at the gates. God had plans well underway for its destruction.

TEKEL, meaning “weighed,” was interpreted, “thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” The balance has been in use nearly to the present day, the device having a beam resting on a pivot in the middle. On one side would be the object to be weighed, and on the other side would be a measured weight which the object to be weighed was to equal. If they were equal, the beam would be level. Used numerous times in the Bible, the balance is mentioned several times by Job. For example, Job said, “Oh that my vexation were but weighed, And all my calamity laid in the balances! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the seas: Therefore have my words been rash” (Job 6:2-3). In Job 31:6, he pleaded: “Let me be weighed in an even balance.” The message **on one side** was the weight of what God required of Belshazzar, considering the fact that God had raised him up and entrusted him with so weighty a position as king; that he was a human being made in God’s image and whose purpose it was to praise Him, not idols; and that he should have learned from the experiences of his grandfather. **On the other side** was Belshazzar and the way he actually was. The scales should have balanced. However, the king was found much too light, far too lacking in moral character, decency, and humility before God—“found wanting.”

UPHARSIN, PERES the singular, meant “divisions,” the interpretation of which was “thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” For their wickedness, the Babylonian Empire would be punished, as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. 13:17-22).

And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith Jehovah, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate for ever (Jer. 25:12).

That very night, these prophecies were fulfilled.

Belshazzar carried out his promise, making Daniel third ruler in the kingdom, with royal robe and medallion. He hardly expected his kingdom to fall so quickly, as noted before. The question arises: Why did Daniel accept the honors? We must remember that Daniel was still subject to Belshazzar's rule, and Daniel had already expressed clearly his reticence to accept such rewards. But, likely it was also a recognition of the fact that God had indeed revealed His message and made it known through His servant Daniel and would have His way in the kingdoms of men.

THE FALL OF BABYLON

"In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean King was slain; Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old" (Dan. 5:30-31). The heinous, blasphemous insolence of Belshazzar called forth swift exaction of God's justice. There was no sign of repentance on the part of the king and his subjects; in fact, Darius died drunk. Solomon wrote a warning to all: "If a tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be" (Ecc. 11:3). As death finds us, so shall the judgment.

The question arises: How was the seemingly impregnable city conquered in one night: (1) The river was diverted, as mentioned earlier; (2) It is thought by some that the priests of Marduk, jealous over Nabonidus having brought many rival gods into the city, let down the draw-bridges for the invading army; (3) The lords were in a drunken stupor and thus could not defend the city. However, one must remember the providence of God.

The general of Cyrus, Gobryas (Darius) the Mede, was appointed governor of Babylon for three to three and one-half years, until Cyrus the Persian came in and proclaimed himself "King of Babylon and King of the Nations," at which time he caused to happen the first return of the Israelites to Palestine (535 B.C.). Thus was the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire.

THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED TODAY

This study would be incomplete without citing some of the many vital lessons to be gleaned from these sad and tragic events and from the principle: Weighed in the Balances, and Found Wanting.

1. Very often when persons are engaged in sinful acts, the stock observation and attempted defense is: "I see no harm in it." There is noth-

ing inherently sinful about a feast; in fact, it is often very appropriate and enjoyable. The Word even speaks of “love feasts.” There was nothing sinful about Belshazzar’s having a feast for his lords. However, when alcohol was introduced, there **was** harm in the activity. How many have been the times when such has been the defense for “social” drinking, attending the prom (perhaps even dancing), pornography, use of illegal drugs, evil associations, sexual promiscuity, forsaking the assembly, et al.? Was there any harm in the drunken feast of Belshazzar? Satan convinced Eve there was no harm in eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:1ff). He tried the same tactic on Christ (Mat. 4:1ff). Just because one sees no harm in something may not mean it is absent.

2. Sin is progressive in its nature. First there was drinking, then much drinking, then bringing in the wives and the concubines (perhaps an orgy), followed by drinking wine in the vessels dedicated for temple worship to God, culminating in rank blasphemy, and using those vessels to praise idols. What if they had not taken the first drink? Nobody gets drunk who does not take the first drink, nor does he or she become an alcoholic. Alcohol dulls one’s sense of judgment and resistance, morality becomes immorality, self-control is lost, and disaster follows. Compare the sin of David with Bathsheba. It has been correctly observed that sin will take you where you do not want to go, take you farther than you want to go, and keep you longer than you want to stay. Very regrettably, many do not return from the far country.

3. In times of danger, it is folly to call upon idols of man and/or upon the astrologers and soothsayers. They were impotent to read and interpret the handwriting of God upon the wall; neither could they save the city from the Medes and Persians. Furthermore, to practice astrology is an abomination to God. Job wrote that astrology is tantamount to having “denied the God that is above” (Job 31:26-28). Those who became Christians in Ephesus burned their magical arts books; the occult is a great threat to Christianity and to the souls of mankind.

4. The wisdom of the world cannot answer the questions of eternal importance: “Where did I originate,” “What is my purpose here,” and “Where am I going?” The monumental frauds whom Belshazzar called and to whom he appealed did not have the answers. They did not even believe in God (1 Cor. 1:21). When persons abandon revelation and inspiration for human reason, it always ends in vain speculation and vain

imagination (Rom. 1:18-23), pure foolishness (cf., Jer. 10:23; Psa. 14:1; Col. 2:8; et al.). The devil uses many devices to turn people from the God of heaven to atheism, but **he** believes in God!

5. Belshazzar profaned the sanctified, dedicated vessels of the temple of God in drinking wine in them and in praising the gods of gold, silver, et al. Many persons have profaned the name of God by claiming man-made doctrine and human philosophy to be His; they take the Lord's name in vain. The false prophets sinned thus, as recorded in Ezekiel 13:6, "They have seen falsehood and lying divination, that say, Jehovah saith; but Jehovah hath not sent them." Christ warned, "But in vain do they worship me, Teaching *as their* doctrines the precepts of men" (Mat. 15:9). All types of *ism's* profane God's name: Humanism, Liberalism, Antiism, Radicalism, Denominationalism, Catholicism, etc., connecting the name of Christ to doctrines of men (Mat. 7:21-23).

6. We must be aware always of the all-seeing eye of God. The blasphemy of Belshazzar could not be hidden from the God of heaven. Hagar exclaimed, "Thou art a God that seeth" (Gen. 16:13). We can fool some people some of the time, but we cannot fool God any time. Jonah learned abruptly and with great trepidation that a person cannot run from "the presence of Jehovah" (Jon. 1:3). God is omniscient (Psa. 139:7-16). Belshazzar made the fatal mistake of shaping God in the image of his own making, rather than honoring Him in the infinite character of the Creator. Often, we reconstruct God in our minds as **we** wish for Him to be; God will not be limited!!

7. Belshazzar showed great folly in trusting in **things**. He trusted that the walls of the city and the moats around the city would hold out the enemy. With the enemy at the gate, he should have been praying to God and preparing; this was not time to be reveling. When people trust in things, they are at the edge of doom, for they feel they do not need the Lord. Israel trusted in the mountains of Samaria (Amos 6:1). The rich farmer trusted in things, whereas the Lord said that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Instead of preaching to himself that **things** were his most important possessions, he should have been preaching to himself that his **soul** was his most valuable possession (cf., Mat. 6:19-20; Col. 3:2). Interestingly, the rich farmer, who trusted in the material, was the only one Christ ever called a fool (Luke 12:20).

8. Belshazzar should have learned from the experiences of his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. Why does man feel that he **personally** must experiment with and engage in sin and rebellion against God? Why are we often not wise enough to benefit from others' sins and fatal results?

9. To Belshazzar, the one true God was the "God of last resort." He had spent his lifetime trusting in idols. Finally in desperation, when faced with the supernatural and a guilty conscience, he seeks for Daniel. When everything and everybody else fails, the preacher is called. Never before have eternal things mattered. It is to be wished that the person will be genuinely sorry, which leads to genuine repentance and reformation of life. Too often, the world has too great a hold on a person's heart. See Proverbs 1:23-33, Psalm 37:13; 59:8, Matthew 19:16-22.

10. Daniel was God's preacher; it has been correctly observed that in the pulpit, Daniel had no other master than the God of heaven. Belshazzar did not die without being exposed to the righteous influence of God's people (who were in his realm), the history and examples of his grandfather, and the rebuke and warning of Daniel. The Bible student knows that with every warning of impending doom there is the accompanying offer of forgiveness and mercy if the offending party will bring himself to repent (See Jon. 3:4-4:2). Daniel did not water down the foreboding, severe message even for the king; his King was God of heaven and earth. His preaching was motivated by neither position, fortune, nor fame but from supreme love and loyalty to God and to His Word. Of course, he had a heart which sought the eternal welfare of all men.

11. The time is coming when each of us shall be weighed in the balances. On one side will be God's perfect determination of what each person should and must be, and on the other will be who each of us truly is. Belshazzar did not measure up; he was too light. It spelled doom for his immortal soul. He could have determined otherwise. How do you and I measure up to God's standard. Is the beam level? Have you, dear reader, heard the Word (Rom. 10:17), believed in Christ (John 8:24), repented of past sins (Acts 17:30-31), confessed Christ before men (Acts 8:37), been baptized for remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16)? Have we as children of God, citizens of the church/kingdom been faithful (Rev. 2:10)? Every accountable person who ever lived will be judged according

to his or her works (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). At that day, those who shall have refused to bow before God in life (as Belshazzar) shall bow before Christ at the judgment; but, then it shall be **too late**. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

12. Life is so very uncertain. For Belshazzar, he was in the very last hours, perhaps minutes of his life. The ratio is the same as it has always been, one death for one life. No one can guarantee that he or she will be alive the same time the next day (Jam. 4:13-15). Woe to those who sin away the day of opportunity!

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

“O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM” MATTHEW 23:37

Tom Wacaster



Tom Wacaster is a native of Texas. He is a graduate of Brown Trail School of Preaching and attended East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. Tom began preaching in 1972 and has served congregations in Oklahoma and Texas. He has done mission work in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Russia, and Ukraine. Tom serves as teacher at the Houston College of the Bible in Spring, Texas, and works with the church in Baytown, Texas.

Tom and his wife Johnnie Ann have two children and four grandchildren.

What a unique theme for a lectureship series: *Sad Statements In The Bible*. In an age when men are clamoring for peace, and when the false prophets proclaim “peace, peace” when there is no peace, it is good to give careful consideration to those statements in God’s Word that call our attention to the truth that there are, indeed, occasions when things are truly sad. But, one need not be a pessimist or a “worry-wart” simply because he concentrates on those sad statements in God’s Word. They are put there for “our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).¹ And while we are admonished to think on “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report” (Phi. 4:8), spiritual integrity demands that we occasionally look at and learn from those things in the Bible that are not as *positive* as some would like them to be. And while some would think a lectureship with such a theme as this is overly *negative*, let me suggest that it is, using Paul’s language, “much in every way” a positive series of lectures for your consideration. Having said that, we happen to think that the passage assigned for this hour is one of the saddest in all of Holy Writ. Of this chapter, G. Campbell Morgan wrote:

This chapter is one of the most sublime and awful in the whole inspired volume...It is awful in its majesty, terrible in its resistless force. With what relentless persistence and unflinching accuracy He revealed the true condition of the leaders of the people, their occupation with externalities and pettiness, and their neglect of inward facts and weightier matters. Here, indeed, if ever, we have "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." One can almost feel the withering force of His strong and mighty indignation—indignation directed, not against the people, but against their false guides. And yet behind it all is His heart, and the "woes" merge into a wail of agony, the cry of a mother over her lost child.²

It is particularly sad because of the enormous blessings that God had bestowed upon them. What a glorious history they had. What marvelous providential protection and watchful care they enjoyed. Paul enumerated their blessings in Romans 9:3-5. They were (1) Paul's "kinsmen according to the flesh"; (2) they enjoyed the proud heritage of being called "Israelites"; (3) they were the "adoption" of God; (4) they enjoyed the "covenants" with Jehovah God; (5) the law was given unto them and through them; (6) they were the recipients of God's marvelous promises; and (7) it was through them that the Christ came "concerning the flesh." Was there any advantage in being an Israelite? Oh yes: "Much [in] every way" (Rom. 3:2). And this is what made our Lord's words in Matthew 23:37-39 so very, very sad.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Think with me for a moment on the remote context. Israel had been indicted. John the Baptizer told them: "even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees" (Mat. 3:10). With their hearts hardened, they marched inevitably forward toward their ultimate destruction. "And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; And seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive" (Mat. 13:14).

While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light. These things spake Jesus, and he departed and hid himself from them. But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him: that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be

fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this cause they could not believe, for that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and he hardened their heart; Lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, And should turn, And I should heal them” (John 12:36-40).

Every conceivable attempt had been made to entrap Jesus—to catch Him teaching error or; to find some violation of the law in His life and/or teaching. But after all was said and done, the Jewish authorities stood self-condemned. And yet, with all of the energy that Heaven could muster, every conceivable effort was put forth to call them to repentance. Yet, tragically, they remained stubborn, solidified, and sinful. They had reached that point in the spiritual journey away from God wherein it was *impossible* to cease from sin. Like those of whom Peter wrote:

But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed, suffering wrong as the hire of wrong-doing; *men* that count it pleasure to revel in the day-time, spots and blemishes, revelling in their deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; enticing unstedfast souls; having a heart exercised in covetousness; children of cursing (2 Pet. 2:12-14).

We want to accomplish two things in our lesson. To help us appreciate the force of our Lord’s words, we want to take a close look at Israel’s *Pitiful Condition*. Having done so, we will turn our attention to the words of our assigned text as we study our Lord’s *Plaintiff Cry*.

ISRAEL’S PITIFUL CONDITION

The situation that the nation was in did not happen over night. Their plight began even before our Lord came to this earth. We need only go back to the time of the establishment of the kingdom itself. Determined to be like the nations about them, they cried out for a King. God told Samuel: “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). What the nation of Israel did that day, the Gentile world had done much, much earlier (Rom. 1:20-32). The pitiful condition of the Gentiles is set forth in that chapter. Once they had rejected God, all that was left was a trek further and further away from God. Take a close look at the catalogue of heinous crimes and moral

degeneracy. What we see is a pitiful condition that results from man's rebellion against God.

One would think that Israel would know better; that somehow they would have learned from their earthly counterpart. But alas, they did not. Led by a king that was himself disobedient (1 Sam. 15), the nation drifted further and further away from God. Like a harlot whose life was wasted in adulterous pleasure, Israel "played the harlot" (Hos. 2:5), eventually arriving at the point where God had a "controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land" (Hos. 4:1). The nation was characterized by "swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; they break out, and blood toucheth blood" (Hos. 4:2). Refusing to listen to God's messengers, the prophets, they chose instead to listen to the false prophets who "have healed also the hurt of my people slightly, saying, **Peace, peace;** when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). Down, down, down they went until Jeremiah would write:

A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:30-31).

The immediate context provides us with some additional information regarding Israel's pitiful condition. First, *there was hypocrisy on their part*.

Then spake Jesus to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, *these* do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not (Mat. 23:1-3).

Hypocrisy is one of the most despicable traits a man may possess. A man's journey away from God may not begin with hypocrisy, but be assured that once a person dons the garb of Pharisaic hypocrisy, he has started the journey toward his lamentable Jerusalem. An unknown poet wrote:

"I won't go to church with hypocrites,"
I've heard some people say;
But in the church, or out of the church,
They're with them every day.

Did you ever see a business place,
 A home, a lodge, or school
 Where not a member ever dared
 To disobey a rule?

A hypocrite, as you must know,
 Pretends what he is not;
 And you will find him in the church,
 The school, the club, or what.

It doesn't matter where you go,
 Some hypocrites you'll find;
 But always where there are counterfeits
 There must be genuine.

So, my dear friend, take my advice:
 Behind none try to hide.
 You'd have to be quite small, you know,
 And then, 'twould ne'er abide.

You answer for the one that wears
 Your shoes; I'll do the same.
 If you miss heaven, hear it now,
 You are the one to blame.

*And, oh, the bitter, sad remorse
 Is more than tongue could tell—
 That will be yours, eternally,
 With hypocrites, in hell!*

Second, they were *filled with pride*.

But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted (Mat. 23:5-12).

One has written, “Phariseism is pride which has matured. Thus it trusts in itself that it is righteous, and it is this same pride which leads to set others at naught.”³ But those who are proud and arrogant shall be brought low. It was reported that on one occasion, when Muhammad Ali was traveling to a boxing match, that just before takeoff the stewardess reminded Muhammad Ali to fasten his seat-belt. “Superman don’t need

no seatbelt," replied Ali. The Stewardess replied, "Superman don't need no plane, either."

Third, *they blocked entrance into the kingdom of God for both themselves and others*. "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter" (Mat. 23:13). Who could imagine someone actually blocking the way to heaven's gate? If a person had a life-threatening illness, what would we think of someone who blocked proper treatment or interfered in getting that person aid? But, alas, there are those today who actually hinder others from entering the kingdom of God. Parents shut the kingdom of heaven against their children when they fail to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Denominational theologians shut the kingdom of heaven against precious souls when they preach their soul-damning doctrines and discourage and even interfere with the truth being presented. For more than 75 years Communist leaders blocked entrance into the kingdom of God with their "no-God" philosophy. Even in our beloved United States of America governmental officials, with the help of atheists, evolutionists, and humanists, have successfully blocked the gates to heaven's kingdom. Our Constitution's separation of church and state has been misinterpreted to mean elimination of church by the state. Let all learn the lesson here. When men shut the kingdom of heaven against men, they are rapidly moving toward their lamentable "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

Fourth, *there was mis-directed zeal*. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves" (Mat. 23:15). Paul would later write, "For I bear them witness that they have a **zeal** for God, but not according to **knowledge**" (Rom. 10:2). Zeal is good; but zeal without knowledge is worse than no zeal at all. Zeal without knowledge has caused harm to the Lord's church. Some have a zeal to preach but will not make proper preparation. A great portion of our brotherhood factions are the result of misdirected zeal. In an effort to increase mission work, the missionary society was formed. In their zeal to improve the singing in the church, instrumental music made its way into the church and caused the great division of the early 1900s. In their zeal to oppose "institutionalism," some of our brethren

went to the other extreme and opposed support of orphan's homes and cooperative evangelism. Zeal for spirituality led some into Pentecostalism and emotionalism. The zeal to win souls led to the Crossroads and Boston movement. Zealous of more scholarship, far too many have drifted into liberalism and modernism. In an effort to combat error and liberalism, some in their zeal have gone to the other extreme and have created a hysteria in the brotherhood—a hysteria that judges every brother guilty until proven innocent; a hysteria that sees a false teacher behind every bush. We must never forget that zeal alone is not enough. If zeal, in and of itself, were enough, then there would have been no need for a supernatural revelation from God. Oh yes, these Pharisees were zealous, but theirs was a mis-directed zeal.

Fifth, *there were broken promises aplenty.*

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is a debtor. Ye blind: for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? He therefore that sweareth by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And he that sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that sweareth by the heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon" (Mat. 23:16-22).

The Jews had an elaborate system of *promises* and *vows*. Promise by the "temple, it is nothing." But promise by Jehovah God, and your promise was binding. Anything else was but a child's game of "cross your fingers." But God had warned them that making a vow was serious business.

Or if any one swear rashly with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall utter rashly with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these *things* (Lev. 5:4).

"When a man voweth a vow unto Jehovah, or sweareth an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Num. 30:2). Those who are "of the world" seem to have no problem with broken vows and unkept promises. Marriage vows seem to mean nothing any more. "Until death do us part" has given way to "until we get tired of one another," or "until

the going get tough." Unfortunately, some of our brethren need to take a closer look at this pitiful condition that leads down the road to their lamentable, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

Sixth, *there were misplaced priorities.*

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone! (Mat. 23:23).

Bobby Knight, the coach of the 1980 national champion Indiana University basketball team told his team: "Don't fight the rabbits. Fight the elephants. If you spend your time fighting the rabbits, you will get killed by the elephants." It is an indisputable truth that there is more to do in this life than you can ever possibly do. There is more to see than you can ever see, and more to read than can ever be read. It comes down to this. You must choose what you will do with your time. So, what does Matthew 6:33 mean to you and I as children of God's kingdom? One author stated it so well:

It means that when I consider a job offer, my first consideration will not be how well it pays but whether it will interfere with my ability to worship and serve God faithfully. It means that when I consider becoming involved in recreational activities—scouting, baseball, football, etc.—I will consider first of all not how much I will enjoy them but whether they will keep me away from worship and Bible class. Will they strengthen my Christian character or weaken it? It means that when I plan a trip, I find out about the church in that area before I go and make sure I'm able to meet with the saints on the Lord's day wherever I am. It means that as a young person choosing a college or university, I consider as the primary factor how it will effect my spiritual life rather than its prestige or price or academic offerings. I think it also means that when finances are tight, I look for other areas in which to cut expenses before reducing my contribution to the Lord's work.⁴

Is it not funny....

How much effort it takes to read a chapter or two from the Bible every day, but how easy it is to read a newspaper?

How much of a sacrifice it seems to be to spend an hour worshipping God, but how easy it is to spend an hour watching TV?

How easy it is to talk to your friends about your views on politics, but how hard it is to speak about faith in Christ?

How difficult it is to work a special meeting at church into your schedule, but how easy it is to work in a social function?⁵

Seventh, *there was ritualism over pure religion.*

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also (Mat. 23:25-26).

Here was *symbolism over substance*. It is like wearing a ribbon to show you care for the homeless, but doing nothing to help them in their plight, or putting a bumper sticker on your car saying, “Honk if you love Jesus,” but never obeying the least of His commands. It is like putting on an air of holiness and piety at church services and then going home to watch your R-rated and X-rated television soap operas or movies. Oh the sorrowful wail over those who cleanse the outside of the cup, but within they are full of extortion and excess!

Eighth, *there was hidden iniquity.*

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Mat. 23:27-28).

The Psalmist writer prayed:

Who can discern *his* errors? Clear thou me from hidden *faults*. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not have dominion over me: Then shall I be upright, And I shall be clear from great transgression (Psa. 19:12-13).

Again, “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, Our **secret sins** in the light of thy countenance” (Psa. 90:8). Israel of old thought they could engage in sin and not be seen by God. The prophet Ezekiel recorded:

And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel; and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, every man with his censer in his hand; and the odor of the cloud of incense went up. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in his chambers of imagery? for they say, Jehovah seeth us not; Jehovah hath forsaken the land (Eze. 8:11-12).

In the final analysis, there is no such thing as “secret sin” in the eyes of Jehovah God. In Romans 2:16 we learn that there is a day coming “when

God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ." We read in Hebrews 4:13, "And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Oh, yes, hidden iniquity will move us ever closer to our lamentable, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

Ninth, *there was persecution of the righteous.*

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Mat. 23:29-36).

When they did not like the message, they killed the messenger. Why is it, my friends, that a church will spend all kinds of money and go to great lengths to acquire the services of a preacher—one whom they claim they want to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—and then drive him out of town on a rail when he preaches the truth? Paul wrote to the Galatians—those very ones who would have plucked out their eyes and given them to Paul—and asked, "am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). Would that we would be like those Thessalonians:

And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, *even the word* of God, ye accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe (1 The. 2:13).

Yes, the foundation had been laid. They began to throw off their wonderful and blessed association with Jehovah God many centuries before our Lord spake these sad, sad words. Theirs was a long history of rebellion and rejection. And so the time had come for their casting off. But heaven does not rejoice in the loss of a soul. Not a single one. But when all that was left was their sad condition, all that remained was our Lord's sad statement. Hence, we turn now to:

OUR LORD'S PLAINTIFF CRY

Not all statements are sad. But there is something in these verses that makes this passage one of the saddest in all of Holy Writ. Like the villain in “The Last Crusade,” who selected the chalice that brought death, it can be said, “He chose poorly.” In the final analysis, our lives are made up of the sum total of our choices. That being the case, there is no such a thing as an “insignificant choice.” Take for example two, fictitious (yet not so fictitious) boys. Brothers in the flesh, one grows up to be a faithful Christian, even an elder in the Lord’s church; the other has no use for the church. One has a wonderful wife of more than 30 years; the other has been through three divorces. One never drinks and is careful to maintain an exemplary moral life; the other is vulgar and immoral. How is it that these two men, from the same family background, grew up so differently? There is one factor that we so often miss. That one factor that determines and shapes our destiny is the way we make our choices. In his article: “Determining Factor: Small Everyday Choices,” Stafford North wrote:

Think of the many choices we face daily! Shall I visit a sick friend or watch TV? Shall I respond kindly or harshly? Shall I take a few minutes with each child in the evening or “veg out” on the couch? Shall I share a treat or keep it for myself? Shall I yell at the person who cuts in front of me or be patient? Shall I study my lesson or call some friends? Shall I give in to my tendency to stay by myself or push myself to make contact with others? Shall I kiss my wife before leaving the house? Shall I subscribe to another magazine or send a few dollars to a Christian camp? Shall I say some good things about the preacher or criticize him? Shall I keep pouting because I didn’t “make the team” or practice to get better? And on it goes. Each of today’s small decisions “programs” us for tomorrow. The more times we make a similar decision about our time, money, treatment of others, church attendance, visiting the sick, or taking the initiative in something good, the more likely we are to make a similar decision the next time.⁶

Joshua made that famous statement:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah (Jos. 24:15).

One thing we must not forget—our choices will result in certain consequences. Look with me, therefore, at the **choices** and the **consequences** in our text.

As for her *choices*, they were most significant. First, **she chose to destroy those sent to her**. Israel's history is replete with examples of Israel's hatred for and persecution of those prophets sent to them. From Abel, whose blood yet "speaketh" (Heb. 11:4b), to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachia. Their hands were bathed in blood, yea the blood of those who would bring them the life-giving words that they so desperately needed. Many a faithful preacher, elder, or every day Christian has experienced the same kind of treatment at the hands of ungodly and hypocritical brethren. We must never forget that they who live godly lives in Christ shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). How do **you** treat the messenger that is sent unto you? Do you welcome the truth of God's Word? Or, were it within your power, would you stone the prophets and kill those who are sent unto you?

Second, **she spurned God's gracious and repeated offer**. How often would I have gathered thy children together" (Mat. 23:37). Look at two of those words and think with me about God's longsuffering. "How often"? In fact, Israel not only spurned God's love, they tested His patience. When we consider God's wonderful longsuffering we are brought face to face with the seeming conflict between God's wrath and His love. "This is so," says one author, "because the main element in divine patience is *delay and restraint in the execution of wrath*"⁷ Isaiah wrote, "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off" (Isa. 48:9). God's patience, therefore, is love in the deferring or abating of punishment. Had God determined to give us what we deserve, when we deserve it, we would have all perished long ago. It is God's gracious longsuffering that put that punishment on *hold*, so to speak, until Jesus could be sent as a propitiation ("**wrath satisfier**") for our sins.

This is the reason why God in his patience could delay his wrath or even cancel it for Israel or David or Nineveh. He was not ignoring it or just letting it evaporate; he was looking ahead to the time when his wrath would be poured out on Jesus Christ in his atoning death, the time when Jesus would suffer this wrath in our place. *This is the basis of the patience of God*, whether it be patience with Old Testament sinners or New Testament sinners.⁸

Oh, how patient God was with Israel:

slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; and that will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the

iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation (Num. 14:18).

He was

merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness. He will not always chide; Neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, Nor rewarded us after our iniquities (Psa. 103:8-10).

It was because of God's marvelous longsuffering that He "endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction" (Rom. 9:22). But rather than perceive of God's patience as a manifestation of His longsuffering, Israel saw it as an opportunity to continue in their sin. Perhaps no other passage shows God's offer of forgiveness and longsuffering for that rebellious nation than that written by Isaiah the prophet: "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (Isa. 9:12, 17, 21). Israel's big mistake was her failure to respond in humble obedience to God's gracious offer for salvation. "How often" cannot be measured in numbers. It can only be measured in the tears that God shed over Israel, and tears that our Lord shed in His cry over the lost nation. Woe be to the man who spurns God's gracious offer of salvation. God's goodness to you is not necessarily a sign of His approval. Failure to respond will move you ever closer to your lamentable, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." May we pay close attention to the words of Paul: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that **the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?**" (Rom. 2:4).

Having seen the choices Israel made, we now turn our attention to the **consequences of her choice**. Contrary to popular opinion, all men will bear the consequences of the choices they make. Israel was no exception.

First, our Lord said, "**Your house is left desolate.**" No longer would Jesus call it His "Father's house" as He had done in John 2:16. They had corrupted the temple worship. It was now "**their house**" because it was organized the way **they** wanted it; worship was as **they** desired. Is there not a lesson for us? When the false teachers influence congregations to abandon the God-given pattern for worship and work in the Kingdom, they embark upon a course that will lead to the inevitable ruin and wreck of that congregation. Failure to "remember...and repent" will cause Christ to "come...and...move thy candlestick out of its place" (Rev. 2:5). I fear that there are many congregations that display the name "Church of

Christ" on their sign out front who have had the candlestick removed a long, long time ago. When congregations seek to imitate the denominations around them, then like Israel of old it is now **their** house, and it is left **desolate**. It is a sad, sad day when our God takes away His candlestick from a congregation.

Second, **God's fellowship was withdrawn**. When Jesus told Israel, "Ye shall not see my face," He effectively, forcibly, and irrevocably withdrew His fellowship from physical Israel. All that remained was the wait for the final destruction of that nation some 40 years later. What a great blessing to be in fellowship with the Father. But what a horrible curse to have God's fellowship withdrawn. "Ye shall not see my face." There is a sense of finality about those words. But beloved, if we will "walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Similarly: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

CONCLUSION

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." May none of us ever hear similar words fall from the lips of our Lord and Master. Of course, the outcome depends upon the choices we make in the here and now. Far too many folks dream of heaven, wish they could go there, or hope that home may someday be theirs, but they do little to make it a reality. There is a great day coming, the which will be a sad and sorrowful day for the many. It will be a day when, for the most part, the whole of humanity will hear their lamentable, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

²G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1959), p. 420.

³James Bales, *The Faith Under Fire* (Shreveport, LA: Lambert Publishing House, 1967), p. 136.

⁴Jim Mulligan, *The Mart Messenger* (Mart, TX: Weekly Bulletin), December 5, 1999.

⁵Dick Marcear (Faith Village Church of Christ Bulletin), January 12, 1995, p. 1.

⁶Stafford North, "Determining Factor: Small Everyday Choices," *Christian Chronicle*, October 1996, p. 20.

⁷Jack Cottrell, *What The Bible Says About God The Redeemer* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1987), p. 357.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 359.

“DEPART FROM ME” MATTHEW 25:41

Tim Nichols



Tim Nichols was born on October 19, 1956, at Barberton, Ohio. Immediately after high school he enlisted in the United States Army for a three-year tour of duty. While stationed in Europe, Tim attended the University of Maryland (European Division) for two years. He received a B.A. degree in Bible from Harding University in 1981 and a M.S. in Psychology from Frostburg State University in 1989.

Tim preached for the Barrackville Church of Christ in Barrackville, West Virginia, from 1981 to 1983. Since 1983, he has worked with the Keyser Church of Christ in Keyser, West Virginia. He is the associate editor of *The Gospel Journal*. Tim has been a part-time instructor at Potomac State College of West Virginia University in Keyser since 1989. He teaches classes in Psychology and related subjects and is currently teaching a class in Logic and a class on the Old Testament in the Religious Studies Department.

Tim is married to the former Libby Marie Sprout of Parkersburg, West Virginia. They have three children: Ashley, Robert, and Eric.

INTRODUCTION

This brief statement, in the King James Version of the Bible, is made 14 times in the Scriptures. In 1 Kings 15:19 and 2 Chronicles 16:3, its use involves men speaking to men. In Job 7:19 Job uses these words in a question posed to God at a time when Job supposed that he was being troubled by God. Job asked, “How long wilt thou not depart from me?”¹ David uses the phrase with reference to his enemies after having prayed that God would deal with them. It is almost as though he was saying, in effect: “You had better get away from me, you evildoers, because God is coming to answer my prayer and punish you” (Psa. 6:8). In Psalm 101:4, David declares his intention to be faithful to God and he says, “A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked *person*.” In Psalm 119:115, as he declares his deep affection for God’s Word, he writes, “Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.” In light of God’s judgment upon the wicked, David expresses his desire not to have to be associated with them. He wrote: “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye

bloody men” (Psa. 139:19). Jeremiah seems to be expressing an idea from the mind of God Himself when he writes, “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, *and* they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 17:13). He later informs us that God will not turn away from His people and that men who have the fear of God in their hearts will not turn away from Him (Jer. 32:40). Paul prayed on three occasions, using these words, that his “thorn in the flesh” might “depart from” him (2 Cor. 12:7-8). When Peter felt himself unworthy to be in the presence of the Lord, who had just performed a notable miracle, he fell upon his knees and used these words to ask the Lord to leave his sinful presence (Luke 5:8).

Some of these uses of the statement are unrelated to the application that our Lord will make of it when He must pronounce final judgment upon the wicked. Some might add to our insight concerning the significance of this statement when it is spoken for the last time. For this, the saddest of all uses, we will look to records found in Matthew 7:23; 25:41; and Luke 13:27.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Mat. 25:41-46).

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto

us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (Luke 13:23-27).

THE CERTAINTY OF THIS STATEMENT

That this statement will be made and enforced by our Lord is a certainty. In a time when men regard little to be certain, this will come to pass no matter what men may choose to think about it. Wishful thinking cannot wish it away. Positive thinking cannot eclipse it out of reality. It is a fixed truth and no matter how men maneuver their thoughts around it, it remains in place.

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things (Rom. 2:2).

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27).

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF THIS STATEMENT

A great many of those to whom it will be addressed will have expected to hear something very different. For these, the statement will be particularly dismal.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

Imagine the profound terror of standing before God in the judgment anticipating with great pleasure that you are about to be conducted through the gates of heaven to remain in a state of perfect bliss for all of eternity. Visualize standing before Jesus Christ and counting yourself among His ardent followers as He begins the separation of souls. Now,

picture the horror of hearing these words: “depart from me” directed at you. All hope will have passed. There will be no light at the end of the tunnel. There will be no remedy. No amount of wishful thinking, bargaining, self-correction, or freshly-discovered and genuine humility will alter the course of future eternity for those self-confident souls who arrive with hearts filled with misplaced hopes based upon systems of men and captained by blind leaders who have now led them fully into the ditch. *Sad* seems too soft a word to describe the utter despondency that will surely come upon those who must hear these words addressed to them.

Several years ago I was visiting in the home of an elderly man, and he was quite excited to inform me that all of his financial concerns were in the past. His enthusiasm was obviously genuine to the degree that we can interpret the light in another man’s eyes. He laid before me his zealous plans for his future, and the fervor was fairly contagious. He had no doubts that he would be able to pay off all his debt, care for those he loved, and many other things. Finally, he got around to showing me what had happened. He had gotten a letter from Ed McMahon and Dick Clark that he had understood to inform him that he had won millions of dollars from some sweepstakes. He had been misled; this author felt heavy-hearted. As I tried to prepare him for the likelihood that he might not have actually won this money. I felt like a very bad man to be giving him notions that seemed to dim the cheerful light in his eyes. I felt a tinge of anger at those who would write so as to mislead such a man. That feeling grew as I considered the many thousands of other such men and women who were probably rejoicing in false hope at that very moment.

Those men and women who will arrive at the scene of judgment with an undoubting expectation of hearing the voice of our Lord bidding them to enter into glory, only to hear Him say to them; “Depart from me,” will hear the saddest words ever uttered. Now is the time for us to carry the gospel to mankind in its fullness. The zeal of many may very well be genuine, but to avert the catastrophe of their having to hear these sad words, we must provide them with the Truth that is able to set them free (John 8:32). Concerning zealous Israel, Paul wrote:

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have

not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3).

Zeal, alone, is not a virtue even though many seem to have concluded that it is. Zeal that is based in knowledge and directed toward proper goals is a good thing.

They zealously affect you, *but* not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But *it is* good to be zealously affected always in a good *thing*, and not only when I am present with you (Gal. 4:17-18).

Those of our brethren who seem to have been infected with the misplaced enthusiasm of our religious neighbors and have sought to encourage them in their false hopes rather than to risk hurting their feelings (and seeing the lights in their eyes grow dim in this life) are only contributing to the ultimate disappointment that will surely come. On a much larger scale they are in the position that I was in with reference to my elderly friend. They have come into close contact with religious people who are ecstatically joyful and they have wrongly shared in that joy. Perhaps some of these men began with the hope that such contact would give them opportunity to lead these people to the truth. Now that they have become party to a celebration of false hope, however, they seem unable to do anything other than to endorse the false beliefs that have generated such zeal. On earth, this endorsement masquerades as *love* and *caring*. The mask will be ripped away at the judgment and the moment will finally arrive when false hope will be met with final loss.

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

THE FINALITY OF THIS STATEMENT

The judgment suggested by this statement will be final and unequivocal. This finality seems to have no counterpart in this life. Here, sentences might be altered, men on death row might yet be pardoned, and hope for a better day is never so completely lost. When Jesus has uttered these words, however, all hope will have been lost.

IT IS A SAD STATEMENT

For the One Who Will Utter it

It will be sad for the One Who will utter it. Our Lord has shown Himself to be full of compassion. He wept upon seeing the pain of the mourners for Lazarus (John 11:33-35). Looking upon the stubborn inhabitants of the City of David and remembering how He had always longed to give them His protection while their stubborn hearts would not accept His offered hand, He cried:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! (Mat. 23:37; see also Luke 13:34).

His eternal purpose has been to save mankind (John 3:16-17). He came to earth to seek and to save (Luke 19:10). He wills that no one be condemned by the words that He must one day utter (2 Pet. 3:9), and it will cause Him pain to have to pronounce judgment upon those who stubbornly rejected His compassionate offer to save them.

For the Atheists

It will be sad for those atheists who will hear the One Whose very existence they denied pronouncing judgment upon them. We wonder how many legitimate atheists there truly are. Only the fool has said in his *heart* that there is no God (Psa. 14:1; 53:1). Many have said it with the tongue and with the pen, and many of these have lived as though it were true. Many of these, however, have confessed the knowledge of God's existence when death's door seemed to be near. We have no way of knowing how many genuine fools will be sincerely shocked when they hear these words. They will close their eyes in death expecting all consciousness to cease. They will open their eyes only to discover that they were mistaken. They will be without excuse (Rom. 1:18-21). We cannot force them to accept the abundant evidence for the existence of God that

is already before their eyes, but compassion for them ought to lead us to draw their attention to it—and then to the gospel that is able to save them. "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psa. 5:5).

The Procrastinators

This statement will be sad for those procrastinators who had intended to one day obey the gospel. While we cannot obey for them, we can be sure that they have been adequately taught, and we can urge them to do what they know to be right. We can urge them to consider the inspired wisdom of Solomon who said, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Pro. 27:1). We can say with Isaiah: "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). They can be discouraged from following the dawdling example of Felix upon hearing the gospel: "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25).

The Gullible

It will be joyless for the gullible who failed to personally ask, seek, and knock. The truth that would have saved them will have been available to them and would have been supplied to them if they had only found the will to seek it out (Mat. 7:7-11). Wisdom from God will have been crying out to them, and they will have opted to hear another voice while refusing that of God.

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying*, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat

of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Pro. 1:20-33).

Those who will have uncritically followed some man or organization will yet be held accountable for their failure to seek out Truth. Religious organizations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, that have at their very foundation this notion that common men and women ought to just accept their edicts without question, seem to foster the impression that humility is expressed in unquestioning compliance. Notice how clearly Roman Catholic writers express this idea. The following quotes are from *The Unchangeable Church* (a Roman Catholic defense published in 1907 by John Duffy and apparently written by various Roman Catholic authors, Vol. 2, pp. 466-541):

Here is a book, the Bible—the most difficult book that ever was printed; a book which in itself tells us that the unwary and unstable will pervert it to their own destruction. Take this book and find your religion in it, and whatever interpretation you put upon these given passages—those truths which have puzzled so many theologians and philosophers—that is to be your religion! What follows from this? As many religions as there are minds to interpret the written word of the Bible without a guide.

...I grant that at first sight it seems the grandest act of homage that was ever paid to the intellect of man, to put into his hands the most difficult documents that have come down upon the stream of time, and to say: "You are able to interpret them; do it." But I hold that in the day that that word was said to human intelligence, there was a duty imposed upon the intellect of man to which that intellect was totally unequal. There was a load put upon the mind of man that no human mind unaided can bear.

...On every question outside of the religious question—the question of faith—we are as free as our fellow-citizens, and free to...express our opinions upon every question outside of the religious question. And why are we not free on the religious question? For the simple reason that we know what the Church teaches; and we know that to be the truth, and we do not feel ourselves free to contradict the truth. This is the only reason.

...The gates of hell...will never prevail against his Church; but if she falls into any error against faith, the gates of hell prevail against her; therefore she cannot fall into any error against faith. Therefore she is infallible in all matters of faith.

To this could be added the voice of Joseph Smith and his followers who presume to have new or another revelation that men and women must follow that has replaced the Bible.

And because my words shall hiss forth—any of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible!....Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible....Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written (*The Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 29:3-10).

To these we might add all of those who claim to have direct revelations from God in our day; the presumed authority of councils and creeds; and those who claim to have found new principles (new hermeneutics) that rob the Scriptures of their moral force in the lives of those who believe them. All those who follow any man or systems that suggests that they are to be heard and heeded rather than the inspired Scriptures will find themselves at a loss when Jesus prepares to speak these words for the last time.

The noble Bereans, the attitude of their teachers, and the inspired comment concerning the mark of their nobility (Acts 17:11) show us that God honors and expects the individual to conduct personal inquiry into what he or she is taught by others. Teachers who are honest with their subject and with their students love to have such inquiries. The world is filled with contradictory religious ideas to be sure. God has provided an infallible means by which each man and woman can assure himself or herself that the truth has been found. That infallible guide is the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Those who fail to search for it, and to obey it when it is found, will be among those banished by the sad decree of Christ on the day of judgment. Those who had remained indifferent regarding spiritual matters will not remain so.

The Self-Seekers

The self-seekers who, out of pride and vainglory, pressed their own selfish agendas without regard for God's will, will sadly find desperate humility. Diotrefes was a man with such pride and ambition that he attempted to rule the church by his own standards. His deeds were evil, and all such works will be punished eternally (3 John 9-11). Christian conduct is not of pride, but of humility (Phi. 2:3-5; Rom. 12:3). Proud and ignorant men do not consent to wholesome words; they generate strife

instead (1 Tim. 6:3-4; Pro. 13:10). In light of the eternal consequences, let us all be reminded that “pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18). Pride will have carried many to their position on Christ’s left on the day of judgment.

Those Who Had Put Their Trust in Men

It will be sad for those who trusted in men rather than in God. Band-wagons exist not only in the world, but, sadly, they sometimes lead parades through the camp of God’s people. Just as Judah struggled with whether or not they would trust Assyria, Egypt, and chariots of iron—or God, we have strong parallels in our own day. We seem to have circles of brethren who at least seem to feel justified in what they do based upon nothing more than the fact that other men in their circle of friends agree with them. Unity is a beautiful thing when truth is the rallying point and Christ the banner. It is an extremely harmful thing when men are emboldened to launch out from that point with a satisfying sense that they are arm-in-arm and shoulder-to-shoulder with trusted cronies. Such conditions seem to take on a life of their own with no one really minding the store. When brethren tell us that we ought to do or believe certain things because “everyone in the Ohio Valley (or Tennessee Valley, or the State of Texas...) is united in this thing,” we can recognize the beat of the drum and the invitation to leap with enthusiasm on the bandwagon driven by men. Now, the fact that many believe a thing might be a relevant sub-point under the discussion of what God has taught us through His Word, but that is a different matter altogether. Genuine Christians are pleased to stand united with all who will yield to Divine Truth. When the appeal, however, is to rally round specific men or certain numbers of men in some geographical location (or any other earthly category), we are being asked to trust men rather than God.

Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do* evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest *judgment* (Exo. 23:1-2).

Many who trusted men will be sadly disappointed on the day when Jesus utters this brief phrase. In 1 Kings 13 we read the sad judgment of a young prophet who allowed himself to trust in the false statements of the much older prophet rather than the Word that God had given to him. The final judgment, in which Jesus will utter the fateful words: “Depart from

me" will likely find many others who failed to remain with their God-given orders when trusted men advised them to do otherwise.

The Pleasure-Seekers

The pleasure-seekers who could not bring themselves to deny themselves what seemed so pleasant to the eye will be eternally deprived of that in which they placed so much importance in this life: pleasure. A brother once told me of going to visit a brother who had formerly been an elder in the Lord's church but who had become guilty of adultery with a much younger woman. It is said that when they admonished this man to repent and to return, the man responded that he was fully aware that he would be lost for his sin. He then allegedly said a thing that causes us to shudder: "It will be worth it to have this woman!" Those pleasure-seekers who cannot see the brevity of the season of pleasure and measure it against the eternity that lies beyond the grave are beyond hope.

The Backsliders

The final words of Christ for backsliders will be sad. "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: *but peace shall be upon Israel*" (Psa. 125:5).

But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die (Eze. 18:24).

CONCLUSION

Unless we can say to evil in this life: "Depart from me" and then rely upon the blood of Jesus Christ to remove it from us when we obey Him, we can expect Jesus to speak these words to us. Unless we can teach our neighbors and friends the way of salvation they will certainly hear these sad words spoken to them in the last day. May we learn to trust in the Lord and may we do what we can to show others the way in light of the coming judgment.

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto

fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

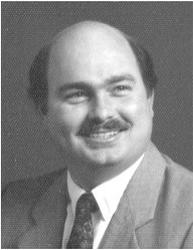
ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“I KNOW NOT THE MAN”

MATTHEW 26:74

Bob Sweeten



Bob Sweeten is the son and grandson of gospel preachers. He is married to Jackie (Deaver), and they have three children: Daniel, Chris, and Rachel. He was educated at Southwest Texas Junior College, University of Texas-San Antonio, and Virginia War College. Bob served as faculty member and Director of Dev. at the Houston College of the Bible, Spring, Texas. He speaks at several lectureships and gospel meetings each year as well as conducting singing schools. He has done local work in Texas and Oklahoma for the past 18 years and currently is working with the Baird Church of Christ, Baird, Texas, since July 1998.

INTRODUCTION

There are many sad sayings found within the pages of the Scriptures. As we look through the keyhole of time and view, if it were possible with the human eye or to hear with our human ear, some of these mournful vocalizations, surely it would bring a tear to the eye of any God-fearing, God-loving Christian. Those most memorable that might touch the heart with pain would be Satan's statement to Eve: "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).¹ Maybe Cain's arrogant reply to God: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9), or possibly Pharaoh's prideful declaration: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exo. 5:2) would fit this category. Yet these statements were all made by godless, hateful individuals and even though such afflict the ear of many, these may be expected to proceed from the lips of so unrighteous a lot.

When we look at those whom we deem righteous and find in them a flaw, a slip of the tongue, or an action unbecoming those professing to be godly, truly the thought of such is saddening. We immediately can relate to such being human ourselves and of "like passions as we are" (Jam. 5:17). Even an amount of anger may rise up in us. Pity or anger,

whatever the feeling one has upon reading these passages, there is no doubt sadness in the reading of them all.

Such is the case with the text at hand. Matthew records (as do Mark, Luke, and John) the denial of Christ by Peter: “I know him not,” as he stood in the court warming himself by the fire. The impact of such a statement is made even more severe knowing from whom it came. How sad the words are, and how sad they must have been to our Lord when at the very moment they were cursed out, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter” (Luke 22:61). How could Peter have said such a thing? The events that lead up to this account leave one wondering about one’s own strength in the moment of adversity.

Peter, impetuous Peter (as he is sometimes called), leaves with us the impression of a man determined and strong, yet in his own way very frail. Peter is known as the first disciple to be called, along with his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16-18). Mark also records that Peter was the first to be called an apostle (Mark 3:14-16). In fact, Peter starts out every list of the apostles in the New Testament. Peter seemed to be set at the forefront of the other disciples from the beginning: “And Simon and they that were with him followed after him” (Mark 1:36). Christ had an inner circle of disciples, and Peter was at the first of these who witnessed the young girl who was raised from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); he was with Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Mat. 17:1-2), as well as in the garden of Gethsemane in witness of Christ’s great agony (Mat. 26:37; Mark 14:33). Jesus seemed to put great confidence in Peter to accomplish certain tasks. Peter and John were sent to make the preparations for the Passover meal (Luke 22:8). It was Peter, of all the disciples that were present in the boat with him, who asked to meet Christ on the water (Mat. 14:28). Peter also was the sword-wielding, courageous one of Matthew 26:51 (John 18:10), and it is surely the case Peter was not aiming for this man’s ear. This alone shows Peter’s love for Jesus (even though it was a physical display of such love).

Of all the history known of Peter, none can forget the famous passage of Matthew 16:13-17.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? **And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou**

art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

This passage, as it relates to the topic at hand sets Peter apart in so many ways from the other disciples of Christ who forsook Jesus. We ask again, how could Peter (having made the good confession before so many witnesses and to the very Lord Himself) commit such an act of treason and debauchery against the God of his salvation? Are we any different?

The courtyard scene is one of infamy. With a view of Peter's activity we see "Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end" (Mat. 26:58). But as he sat observing *the end*, a damsel recognized him, to which he lied, saying, "I know not what thou sayest" (Mat. 26:70). Taking his leave to go to the "porch," another "maid saw him," and there he denies with an "oath, I do not know the man" (Mat. 26:72). Even in the face of overwhelming evidence Peter, in an effort to disguise, mislead, and deceive, "then began he to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man" (Mat. 26:74). Notice the progression.

What implication does this have in our life? Are we any different? Is our sin less offensive to our Lord? We often condemn Judas for betraying the Christ; did Peter not do the same? Let us look at some lessons from this event and this sad saying.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

It Is Possible for One to Love Christ and Yet Slip in a Moment of Weakness and Deny Him

One cannot doubt the sincerity of Peter's love for Christ in many of the statements of Peter throughout the Scriptures. Knowing this fact, we must be warned about the possibility of denying our Lord. The Scriptures give us insight that betrayal is possible. Notice these texts:

Blessed *is* the man that **walketh** not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor **standeth** in the way of sinners, nor **sitteth** in the seat of the scornful (Psa. 1:1).

Hold up my goings in thy paths, *that* my footsteps **slip** not (Psa. 17:5).

Set a **watch**, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips (Psa. 141:3).

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin

that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Rom. 7:15-23).

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them slip* (Heb. 2:1).

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin **which doth so easily beset us**, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1-2).

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

The warning is throughout the Bible (these are but a few) that it is possible, and sometimes the case, that one can love God with all their heart, soul, and mind—yet still slip and sin. John warns us not to even deny that we still sin.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:7-10).

Note what the Holy Spirit by the hand of John teaches: (1) To have fellowship with God we must walk in the light; (2) Walking in the light does not imply a sinless life; (3) In fact, to deny that we have sin is to deceive ourselves; (4) Confession of these sins that are committed will lead to God's cleansing power; (5) To deny any sin in our life as a Christian is to accuse God of being a liar, which is blasphemy, and His Word dwells not in us. Realizing the propensity, possibility, and probability for sin in our life, we then should be ever careful of Satan, who is after the righteous, and his minions who would shipwreck our faith. The prayer on our lips should always be: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil [the evil *one*—ASV]" (Mat. 6:13). Our Lord, in His infinite wisdom, knew the weakness of the flesh and warned

His disciples only moments before He was arrested: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mat. 26:41). We must be aware of the pitfalls and dangers of this world and the likelihood that we at times will be overcome by Satan, stumble, and fall.

Pride Goes Before a Fall

Solomon the wise man wrote, "Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Pro. 16:18); "A man's pride shall bring him low" (Pro. 29:23). Pride is brought on by a lack of fear, and in the spiritual sense it is a lack of fear for God. Paul warned those of Corinth:

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. **Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall** (1 Cor. 10:6-12).

The attitude of those that Paul speaks of is one of pride. This account of Peter, who all should hold in high esteem today, illustrates for us the vulnerability of each and every human to slip from the truth. The Holy Spirit does not tell us as to whether Peter had a pride problem or not. Nor should we misjudge the motives of Peter in this case. It is simply the case that many fall from God's saving grace due to arrogance.

An arrogant, haughty, and proud attitude is contrary to our *spiritual service*. Paul begs those of Rome to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God...not conformed to this world...[not to] think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly" (Rom. 12:1-3). It is not the case that we are *whipped dogs* yet on the other hand we are not to set ourselves up on high looking for the *chief seats*. We are to have a humble spirit (Mat. 5:3); one that looks to God with a contrite heart (Luke 18:13); realizing that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam. 4:6; Pro. 3:34). Keeping close to God through prayer and the study of His Word applied to our hearts will help us from the "pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

“The fear of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom; **and before honour *is* humility**” (Pro. 15:33). “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, **and before honour *is* humility**” (Pro. 18:12).

Courage or Cowardice

What crowd you run with, or stand and warm yourself by their fire, will have an influence on your Christianity. Never is the pressure so great to sin as when Christians socialize with the wrong crowd. Think for a moment and ponder why there were so many people out so late at night (actually so early in the morning) when the Jews brought Christ to trial? Those who stood by observing with Peter could have been those who were with the mob that arrested Jesus. Then again they may have been there as *busybodies* (1 Pet. 4:15). Whatever their reason, it is quite clear that from the text under consideration these were up to no good thing. Peter, as implied from the text, meant to simply blend in with the crowd. The Christian who is only a Christian (?) on Sunday will blend in well with the world. This is a dangerous place for any Christian to stand! God warns us: “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33—ASV). If one takes a clean white shirt and dips it into a vat of used black oil, the shirt becomes soiled. Such a statement may seem trite or silly, yet the very ones who would laugh in derision will be the white shirts standing at the fires of the world someday all the while justifying themselves for being there.

The danger is self-evident. We are called by God to be courageous every day in so many different situations not of our choosing. Being at the wrong place at the wrong time adds to our temptation to play the coward. Peter manifested such cowardice in the face of trials. Peter lied; he lied with an oath—then he cursed, swore, and lied. The evidence is clear!

We are told: “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). To a young preacher Paul encouraged, “Endure afflictions” (2 Tim. 4:5). So it is the fact that “yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The one who teaches that life in Christ here on this earth is a “bed of roses” is spreading a terrible lie! Christ’s own words are: “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat. 16:24). A cross is an instrument of sacrifice. Being a

Christian is not for the feeble! Courage in the face of trials is a must for any who will bear the name Christian.

Thoughts that will help us to make it through trials with courage are the realization of what those that went before us endured for the cause of our Lord.

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of *cruel* mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and *in* mountains, and *in* dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:32-38).

The Hebrews writer reminds us: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Heb. 12:4). Therefore, let us not be cowards in the face of trials. John encourages us: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). This fear is not the fear of God, as so many mistake it for, but the fear of the world and the persecution that comes with the Christian life. The faith that completes our love for God will rid our lives of such fear and cause us to be courageous when put to the test. What can the world do to us? Can the world forcibly separate us from the love of Christ? "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity" (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

Then, too, we have a wonderful tool at our disposal in times of trial. Our God is a mighty God who is King of kings and Lord of lords, He "changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Dan. 2:21). This great and mighty God of our fathers has given to His children the power of prayer. He tells us to "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Mat. 7:7). Only those with no faith doubt the power of the

Almighty God when petitioned by His faithful! Only cowards refuse to pray! Because of this tremendous tool and the intercession, we have strength: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). In that wonderful song we often sing written by James Montgomery, these words ring out to remind us of that terrible moment in time (Peter’s denial of Jesus) and to help us to realize that prayer is available to us.

In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me,
Lest by base denial I depart from thee:
When thou seest me waver, With a look recall,
Nor for fear nor favor suffer me to fall.

Hanging on at a Distance

Sadly this is what is done by too many of our rank and file in the church today. It seems to be an attitude of not wanting to leave the church, but not wanting to be a part of it either. Peter had this problem on this particular night: “But Peter followed him afar off” (Mat. 26:58). It is clear that he was ashamed, as was revealed later by his denial, which was cowardly and full of fear. The outcome of such a defeatist attitude is brought to light in the text. Peter began this fall from grace by following afar off! James wrote, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jam. 4:8). The antithesis of the verse would be “draw away from God, and he will draw away from you.” Peter was destined for failure from this very point on and the lesson should be clear to the Christian today—namely this: “You are headed for destruction the moment you draw back from God.” Lest any of us miss the point, **at the very moment we draw back** from God, we are headed for destruction. Those in the church who are indifferent and apathetic are as lost as those in the world—even worse so! The prophet Amos warned Israel of such disastrous living:

Woe to them *that are* at ease in Zion...That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, *and* invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (Amos 6:1, 4-6).

Israel did not listen and were carried off into captivity because of their sins. A careful reading of Lamentations will give the sad conditions of Israel and the consequence of half-hearted worship and half-hearted service from those that follow God afar off.

The Hebrews writer encourages all Christians: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22). And he wrote also: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38). Jesus warned those of Laodicea: "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). Let us always be near our God in prayer and service, faithful to His cause, and ever ready to stand up and be counted as those who are prepared to die for Him. Surely if Peter could talk to us today he would say: "Learn from my mistake."

CONCLUSION

"I know not the man" truly is a sad statement. Often the thought comes as to the impact of Jesus' look when Peter spat out these words. The Scripture implies that Peter saw Jesus' look. How crushing it must have been to Peter, the rock that crumbled. Luke describes it for us:

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62).

So devastated was Peter that it appears he could not forgive himself of such a horrible crime. John records a rather interesting conversation Jesus had with Peter after His resurrection. The risen Christ asked Peter twice: "Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest [*agapas*] thou me" (John 21:15-16). Christ was asking a probing question using a word that expressed the most complete and all encompassing of loves a person can have. Peter on the other hand was answering: "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love [*philo*] thee" (John 21:15-16). His word choice was one of affection. Clearly Peter did not feel he could use the word *agape* in response to Jesus. It is a studied opinion that he simply could not forgive himself for denying his Lord. Then we are told:

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest [*phileis*] thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest [*phileis*] thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love [*philo*] thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:17).

It is comforting: “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20). Peter was forgiven.

The Scriptures continue to tell us of the life of Peter who went on to become a great apostle. True to form and position in line of the other apostles, it was Peter who was the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), and he takes the leadership role on the day of Pentecost to herald out the message of hope (Acts 2). God, in His infinite wisdom, bestowed upon Peter even more honor to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 62:1-2 and usher into the kingdom full salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11). Such clearly indicates that our God is a merciful God who can restore and use to the greatest good for the kingdom one who would so utterly deny Him. Peter was forgiven.

The comfort afforded all Christians today in their struggle through life is the knowledge that God will forgive our transgressions. Peter does not stand alone on the platform of denial of the Christ, for we all have by our deeds and our words of sin denied our Lord and Savior. But there is forgiveness.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?” MATTHEW 27:46

Joseph D. Meador



Joseph D. Meador, a native of Lubbock, Texas. He and his wife Karen have seven daughters. He has served for seven years as Director of Southwest of Bible Studies in Austin, Texas. He received his formal education from the University of Texas (B.A.), State University of New York, Hebrew Union College, Southwest University (M.S. and Ph.D), and has studied in Israel at Jerusalem University College. He has spoken in meetings and lectureships in sixteen states and has worked with congregations and schools in Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Nevada, and Texas. He is on the board of *The Gospel Journal* and is a staff writer for other papers.

INTRODUCTION

The statement of Jesus as found in Matthew 27:46 (“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani”) is commonly referred to as the fourth word from the cross. Jesus’ cry remains an enigmatic expression to many Christians, as well as to many Bible commentators. Indeed, how is this statement, uttered by Jesus upon the cross, to be understood in light of His earthly ministry as well as His own relationship with God the Father?

Is the statement: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani,” to be understood (as some early gnostic commentators argue) as a manifest expression of a lack of faith by the *human* part of Jesus? Or, is this expression to be interpreted as representing an attitude of fatalism on Jesus’ part (as fatalism was a common Ancient Near Eastern way of looking at life)? When one begins to examine the Protestant commentary tradition, there is the belief that Jesus is referring to the fact that God forsook Him as Jesus became a sin offering. The rationale for such a view is based on the fact that since God cannot look on sin (Hab. 1:13), it is held that God turned His eyes from His Son (a symbolic withdrawal of fellowship). Therefore, the cry of Jesus from the cross is said to represent His anguish over this separation from God. However, how does Jesus’ question

harmonize with His divine omniscience? Why would Jesus ask the Father the question of “Why?” when Jesus already knew the answer to the question (if this interpretation of Matthew 27:46 is true). Indeed, He would have known beforehand why God could not look upon Him in this state if this interpretation is correct. Further, the Hebrew/Aramaic word, which is translated *forsaken*, carries with it the idea that this is an action of breach of relationship. However, there is a vast difference between God not being able (because of His holiness—Hab. 1:13) to look upon His Son as a sin offering, and between God actually forsaking His Son. Although it is unquestionably true that God cannot (nor will He) look upon sin, this interpretation of Matthew 27:46 fails to provide a biblical rationale for God actually *forsaking* His Son. Indeed, God the Father never forsook His Son even when on the cross, and this biblical truth becomes clear after a careful consideration of the original context.

In seeking to understand Jesus’ fourth recorded word from the cross, one must focus upon the original context from which Jesus took His statement. Trying to isolate the phrase (from its original context in Psalm 22) and comment upon it, or seek to understand it simply by a linguistic analysis of Matthew 27:46 is to miss completely the larger picture that Jesus wants us to see.

During the days of Jesus, the Hebrew Scriptures were given a common threefold division, which is echoed in the synoptic gospels (cf., Luke 24:44—law, prophets, and psalms). In these verses, Jesus stated that the Hebrew Scriptures revealed His life, ministry, and Messiahship. This is particularly true of the Messianic teaching found in the book of Psalms. This is certainly evidenced in the first recorded gospel sermon (Acts 2:14-47), where Peter, by inspiration, utilizes a number of passages from the book of Psalms to prove the Messiahship of Jesus and to highlight certain Messianic qualities (i.e., the resurrection, the great Messianic proof which authenticated the claim of Jesus of Nazareth).

In Jesus’ day, there were no numeric divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, including Psalms; nor were there numeric verse divisions. While the book of Psalms had been divided into five general sections (or books), no numeric system of identifying a particular psalm or a particular passage had as yet been invented. The division of the contents of Psalms (into books) took place during the time of the Massorites. However, the individual psalms remained unnumbered, and according to

typical Hebrew manuscript tradition, the common manner of identifying a particular psalm (or, in fact, any Scripture portion) was to recall or to announce the first few words or the first line of the psalm portion (as in a typical synagogue reading). Hence, in the Hebrew Bible, the first book (known in English as Genesis) is known as Bereshith (literally: "in the beginning") from the first word of the first verse. This same manner of naming each book within the Hebrew Scriptures is true for the rest of the Torah. This same procedure is used, in principle, when identifying specific portions of Hebrew poetry and wisdom literature. For instance, Psalm 23 is referred to as "The Shepherd Psalm," and would be called to mind by reciting the first line or title line. As such, when Jesus speaks in the Hebrew language from the cross (as recorded in Matthew 27:46), He is actually making an appeal to those at the foot of the cross to remember the teaching of Psalm 22 (which was known as the "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" psalm). As other psalms began with the descriptive, "My God" (or "Eli)," the entirety of the first line was quoted in order to identify the specific psalm which Jesus had in mind. When this custom is properly understood, we become aware of the amazing fact that even from the cross, Jesus sought to direct the attention of man toward the teaching of God's Word. In essence, even in the final minutes of His life, Jesus continued His role as the Master Teacher. When He was in such a desperate situation, He desired to point man toward God. Yet, most people, however, when faced with far less, can think only of themselves and their own situation. Jesus, in making an appeal to Psalm 22 from the cross, manifested His selfless love for mankind.

But, why on the cross would Jesus appeal to this particular psalm? After a careful analysis of Psalm 22, the answer becomes obvious. Psalm 22 is a powerful witness to the Messianic mission of Jesus of Nazareth as the Suffering Servant of God. Many have missed the teaching of Psalm 22 because they do not understand the direct link between Jesus' quotation of the first line in Matthew 27:46. Indeed, Jesus is calling the attention of all men to the great spiritual truths contained in the twenty-second psalm.

AN EXEGESIS OF PSALM 22:1-31

The twenty-second psalm may be divided into three main portions. The first section is: "The Sufferer's Problem: The Human Experience" (Psa. 22:1-21); the second division is: "The Sufferer's Confidence:

Dependence Upon God” (Psa. 22:22-29); and the third division is: “The Sufferer’s Transformation: An Application For Sufferers” (Psa. 22:30-31). Each of these divisions of Psalm 22 builds thematically one upon the other, and when this particular psalm is seen in the context of the cross, it conveys a powerful teaching regarding the age-old question of human suffering and its relationship to divine grace. Jesus, in referring to Psalm 22 from the cross, seeks to help us understand the relationship between our temporary, earthbound existence and our ultimate home in heaven with God the Creator. Although all men will face a certain amount of suffering, this in no way negates the faithfulness of God to fulfill His redemptive and/or salvational promises. Therefore, men must not lose hope so quickly as to forfeit (by disobedience resulting in a rejection by God) their promised home in heaven.

The Sufferer’s Problem: The Human Experience (Psalm 22:1-21)

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou *art* holy, *O thou* that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*, He trusted on the LORD *that* he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou *art* he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope *when I was* upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong *bulls* of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, *as* a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look *and* stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my

darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.¹

Similar to the overall main divisions of Psalm 22:1-31 (as noted above), this first portion (Psa. 22:1-21) may be subdivided into three sections. First, "Questions Concerning Abandonment By God" (Psa. 22:1-5); second, "Disrespect From Friends and Peers" (Psa. 22:6-11); and third, "Direct and Indirect Personal Attacks" (Psa. 22:12-21).

In the first subdivision ("Questions Concerning Abandonment By God"; Psa. 22:1-5), it is interesting to note that four questions are explicitly asked or implied in verses 1-2. These are: (1) Why have you forsaken me? (literally, for what reason {*hinati*} have you forsaken me?) (2) Why are you so far from saving me? (3) Why are you so far from the words of my groaning? and (4) Why do you not answer me?

These questions are found in the opening portion of the twenty-second psalm; and as Jesus makes use of the psalmic title line from the cross ("Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani"), this question itself introduces the very theme of this particular psalm. The first two verses of Psalm 22 reflect the feelings and emotions which every child of God has felt or thought at one time or another during his or her relationship to God. At times, during periods of spiritual crisis, the individual Christian may feel abandoned by God and helpless in his or her present situation. There may well be the feeling that God is far away and therefore the pain of the sufferer is unknown to God, Who seemingly provides no answer or relief.

However, in Psalm 22:3-5, there is the great assurance of God's presence. In these verses the psalmist specifically teaches that God's character (i.e., His faithfulness, compassion, and concern) can always be counted on.

In the second subdivision of the first section (Psa. 22:6-8), the sufferer feels a complete lack of respect from both friends and peers. In these verses, various personifications are utilized to stress the lack of regard which the sufferer feels is unfairly directed toward him by those of His acquaintance. Certainly, Jesus, hanging from the cross, knows more than any other the abject loneliness which such unfair persecution brings.

It is important to note in this second subdivision that a portion of this Scripture is quoted in the New Testament (Mat. 27:39; Mark 15:29). Indeed, these verses are to be applied to Jesus' suffering upon the cross

and provide us with Jesus' personal insight concerning the emotions regarding the derision and mocking of the crowd. Psalm 22:7-8 are characteristic of the secular response to suffering encountered by children of God. Most people in the modern world fail to understand the relationship which the individual Christian has with God. Such thinking is exactly what we find in Psalm 22:7-8, in that those secular Jews and unbelievers gathered around the cross held that simply because Messiah had a relationship with God, that God would deliver Him by any means, including the use of the miraculous. Such is reminiscent of the fact that there are many today who claim not to believe in God because they have never seen a biblical miracle performed. But such does not characterize the deep and abiding relationship which exists between God and His children. It is this relationship, based upon the objective testimony of the inspired Word, that provides spiritual sustenance in times of physical or emotional suffering. Once again in these few verses, Jesus presents as very real the feelings and emotions associated with those times when we are openly rejected by our family and friends because of our religious beliefs.

However, in Psalm 22:9-11, there is the great assurance of God's love and approval. In these verses, the psalmist portrays God as the infinite and good Creator, Who watches our lives with great interest from birth even to death. In addition, the New Testament provides specific teaching that even though we may suffer the rejection of family and friends, God has provided the church as His divine substitute, so that His children who may thus suffer will lack nothing in this life nor the life to come (Mark 10:28-31).

In the third subdivision of the first section (Psa. 22:12-21), the sufferer experiences both a direct as well as indirect personal attack upon his character and religious beliefs. Once again in these verses, various forms of literary personifications are used in order to try to convey the severity, as well as the depth, of this hostile persecution. As such, the enemies are characterized as strong bulls and roaring lions. Faced with such persecution, the individual sufferer describes himself as being physically incapable of withstanding this hostile attack. Indeed, Jesus, suspended on the cross with pierced hands and feet, knew better than anyone the horrifying and tragic result of such sustained persecution.

There are many times in our own lives when we face various forms of persecution (both indirect, as well as direct). However, in Psalm 22:18-21, there is the great assurance of God's defense and protection. In these verses, the psalmist teaches us that God is never far off and is close by to save (if not physically, then most certainly spiritually and eternally). Jesus upon the cross certainly knew this great truth, and when He asked the profound question: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," there is no doubt that Jesus well knew the answer to the question. Indeed, God never forsakes His faithful children in their time of deepest anguish and personal need; and, as such, God Himself would never forsake His Son upon the cross during His most bitter and agonizing death. Jesus' cry from the cross is therefore not to be seen as a lapse of faith upon His part, but rather He asks a question to which all knowledgeable believers could give answer; and thus He encouraged those around the cross not to despair but to place their complete faith and dependency upon the God of man's salvation.

CONCLUSION

The second main division of Psalm 22 (Psa. 22:22-29) focuses upon the confidence and dependency which the sufferer is to manifest to God, even during times of personal and unjust persecution. The final main division of this psalm (Psa. 22:30-31) provides the necessary information to the sufferer, so that he or she can make the appropriate spiritual application of God's Word during times of testing and trial.

May each of us seek to study further and more deeply from Psalm 22, so that our faith may be fortified during periods of adversity and strife. And may we seek to apply this lesson, which Jesus so compassionately and objectively taught us from His cross.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“GOD HEARETH NOT SINNERS”

JOHN 9:31

Michael Hatcher



Michael Hatcher was born in Pensacola, Florida, the son of a gospel preacher. He is married to Karen (Savage), and they have two sons. He has done local work in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and is presently working with the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida. He has spoken on several lectureships, gospel meetings, to youth groups, and has done radio and television work. He also taught in Texomaland School of Biblical Studies in Denison, Texas, and was the educational director at State Street Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

Michael directed the North Texas Lectureship and currently is director of the Bellview Lectures. He has written articles for several brotherhood publications and a weekly newspaper (from 1987-1994). He was the associate editor of the *Shield Of Faith* and now is editor of *Defender*, the *Beacon*, and the Bellview Lectures book. He is co-author of a book, *Hatcher/Schweitzer Exchange*, an exchange of letters with a Lutheran minister on the subject of Total Hereditary Depravity and other subjects, and a debate on the subject of instrumental music in worship with Baptist, Bob L. Ross.

INTRODUCTION

The disciples come to Jesus with a simple, yet not so simple, request. “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).¹ They had seen the importance that Jesus had placed on prayer in His life. He was often found in prayer, and especially at any major event in His life. When Jesus was baptized He prayed (Luke 3:21); before choosing His apostles (Luke 6:12-13), He spent the whole night in prayer; at the transfiguration (Luke 9:29) He was praying; He prayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead (Luke 11:41). Jesus is often found in prayer just before His death: in connection with His death upon the cross He was found in prayer (John 12:20-28); in the very shadow of the cross He prayed for Himself, His disciples, and all believers (John 17); He prayed on behalf of Peter (Luke 22:31-34); He prayed when He instituted His Supper (Mat. 26:26-29); and He prayed fervently three in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-45). Upon the cross His first words were a prayer (Luke 23:34); He prayed during His

time on the cross (Mat. 27:46); and He prayed at the end of the ordeal (Luke 23:46). Prayer characterized His life. Thus, the disciples requested: "Lord, teach us to pray."

One of the great privileges of being a Christian is that we have the same right of prayer as Jesus had available to Him. While it possibly is not something we take advantage of as we should, it is still a wonderful gift which God has given unto us. L. O. Sanderson stated it correctly in the words of the song, *Pray All The Time*, when he wrote: "The world has lost the right of prayer, And saints have failed to pray; What loss sustained beyond repair! How blind of heart are they!"

PRAYER'S POWER

James explicitly states the power which prayer possesses when he writes, "Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16). The idea behind *availeth* is that it has power, is able, or can do its intended purpose. Then Inspiration adds that it avails **much**, not just a little. One way God informs us of the power of prayer is by examples He gives us.

James gives us the example of **Elijah**.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit (Jam. 5:17-18).

Elijah (*Elias*) was the same (*like passions*) as we are. Notice the great power of prayer in his life. He prayed for it not to rain, and it did not rain for a period of three-and-a-half years. He then prayed for rain, and it rained. One important point to notice from this passage is that there was no miracle involved in all of this. Everything which happened was purely natural. There was great power in Elijah's prayer, even as there is in the prayers of any righteous man today, in exactly the same way as Elijah's—through the providential working of God.

Abraham and Abimelech the king of Gerar would testify to the power of prayer. When Abraham dwells in Gerar, he withholds vital information from Abimelech concerning Sarah, his wife, by saying she was his sister. The failure to inform Abimelech concerning their marital status was wrong, causing Abimelech to take Sarah to be his wife. However, God intervened in this prior to Abimelech coming near her, and

his actions were done in the innocence of his heart. God tells Abimelech to return Sarah to Abraham. We then find the power of prayer. “Now therefore restore the man *his* wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore *her* not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that *are* thine” (Gen. 20:7). Because of the power of a righteous man’s prayer, Abimelech would not die, however failure to pray would have resulted in Abimelech’s death. Prayer possessed preeminent power.

Space forbids us to discuss all the different men and women of faith who prayed to God and the wonderful power which prayer brings. However, consider and study on your own the power of prayer in the lives of **David** as he records God’s deliverance because of his prayers in 2 Samuel 22:1-7, along with other times. God spared the rebellious Israelites destruction in the wilderness because of the prayers of Moses (Exo. 32; Num. 14). Think of **Samson** and when he was sore athirst and prayed; God provided water for him (Jud. 15:18-19). Also, at the end of his life, he prays for strength and receives it (Jud. 16:28-30). Look at the power of prayer in the life of **Hannah**, who prayed for a man-child and God provided (1 Sam 1). Or consider **Daniel**, who because of prayer was cast into a den of lions, but God shut the lions’ mouths (Dan. 6). And certainly **Jesus** is our perfect example in this area as He is in all areas of life. Often Jesus prayed and the Father heard and answered His prayers. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 11:41-42). While there are many other examples, these are sufficient to show the power of prayer in the lives of the faithful. However, let us consider a few of the ways prayer is powerful.

Prayer gives **strength and comfort**. Even an atheist prays in times of trouble for the comfort that it will bring. It was said that there are no atheists in foxholes and that everyone prayed in them. The reason is simple, the comfort and strength that prayer brings. What greater comfort and strength could one have than the opportunity to take everything to God in prayer. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). Knowing He cares for us brings great comfort and strengthens us against whatever may come.

Closely associated with the previous is that prayer will **bring peace** to one's life. Paul writes:

Be careful for nothing [In nothing be anxious—ASV]; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phi. 4:6-7).

We all have difficulties in life, but in prayer we have the right to take those problems to our God. Then we can let God take care of them knowing He cares for us. The result is that we do not have to be anxious or troubled with cares.

Prayer will **stop sin**, even as sin will stop prayer. When the faithful pray, part of that prayer will be concerning sin. They will be confessing sin within their life. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Notice also the emphasis Jesus placed on this in the example prayer he gave. "Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven....And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mat. 6:9-13). The very fact that we are praying these sentiments will help us to stop sin in our lives. Our minds will be centered on living as God wills, and ending sin in our lives. However, when we decide to live in rebellion to God's will, we will stop praying.

Prayer will **bring us closer to God and things spiritual**. Again, like the preceding, when we pray, our minds are brought into harmony with God and spiritual matters, which brings us closer to Him.

Prayer will **alter what would be**. What a marvelous thought, that our prayers will affect the God of heaven to such an extent that He through providential means will change what would be. We observe this with Moses' praying for the rebellious Israelites. God had determined to destroy them, however through Moses' prayers, God spared them. It is also observed in Elijah's prayer that it not rain, and it did not rain; then his prayed for rain, and it rained. The God of the universe hears the prayers of the faithful. "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come" (Psa. 65:2).

However, there are some whom God will not hear. The man healed of blindness said the words of our title: "Now we know that **God heareth not sinners**: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (John 9:31). What a sad situation: that the God of heaven

will not hear the sinner's prayer. However, some do not accept what the blind man said. We will spend the rest of this chapter proving the truth of what the blind man who had been healed stated.

GOD HEARS THE RIGHTEOUS

Since we have previously discussed James' comment relating to the power of prayer, we also should note whom James says has that power. "Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16). James, by inspiration, clearly states that the righteous man's prayers are heard. There is no mention of prayers by someone other than a righteous man.

The wise man (wiser still because he wrote by inspiration of God) stated, "The LORD *is* far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Pro. 15:29). Again it is specifically stated the righteous man's prayer is heard by God. However, at this point we also begin seeing God's relation to the wicked (the man who is not righteous); God is far from that man. Being *far* would indicate to us (especially if this is antithetic parallelism) that God would not hear the wicked man's prayer.

Peter reveals much the same thing when he writes: "For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). The Lord's ears are open to prayers of the righteous. We again learn the Lord's response to those who are not righteous, those who do evil. God is against them or He disapproves of them; thus He would not hearken to their prayers.

We also need to know who the righteous man is. John answers clearly for us by saying, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7). Part of God's nature is that of righteousness. We can possess the same nature as God (2 Pet. 1:4). We can be righteous by doing righteousness. What is the doing of righteousness? The Psalmist said, "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* righteousness" (Psa. 119:172). Since God's commands are righteousness, when we do God's commands, then we are righteous. Paul puts it this way.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to

the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, when we do the gospel of Christ or obey the gospel, then we will be righteous as our God is righteous. Putting it another way, the person who, after hearing the Word of God, believes (Heb. 11:6), repents of his sins (Acts 17:30), confesses his faith in Jesus as God's Son (Rom. 10:10), and is baptized in water for the remission of his sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and then lives according to God's Word (1 Cor. 15:58) is the man who is righteous. This is the man who, when he prays, God hears.

GOD'S NATURE

One of the attributes of God is that He is **holy**. There are more passages that speak of this nature of God than any other part of His character. "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend *is* his name" (Psa. 111:9). "The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psa. 145:17). When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne, he also saw the seraphims: "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). John reveals:

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come (Rev. 4:8).

When Peter calls upon all men to be holy, he states that it is because that is God's nature. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). He quotes what is written in and what the theme of Leviticus is.

What is holiness? The basic etymology of the word is "apart from the earth." It came from the altars which were built apart from the earth. God had commanded that altars be built on stilts or legs so they would be separated from the earth. These altars were referred to as holy. *Holy* is applied in the Scriptures in two ways: free of sin, and dedicated or consecrated. When used of God, it carries the first of these meanings.

God is holy: free of sin. The idea of light as expressed in relation to God is the idea of His being free of sin. John writes: "This then is the

message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The last phrase is more emphatic in the Greek than in the English. The Greek uses a double negative, which is used to give emphasis; no, not even one speck of darkness in God. *Darkness* stands for sin in the Bible (John 3:19). Thus when John reveals that there is not any darkness at all in God, John is revealing that God does not have any sin: He is free of all sin. James expresses the same idea when he writes, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam. 1:17). James identifies God as the Father of lights. It is not just that He is the Creator of lights (sun, stars, etc.), but that all light comes from His nature for His nature is Light. While there is variation with the earthly lights, there is no variation with God. Any way, any time you look at God, there is only pure absolute light. There is never any darkness (sin) in God.

Since God is without any sin, we also notice that He cannot associate with sin because of that holy nature.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? (Hab. 1:13).

For this reason Peter reveals that God’s face is against those who are in sin. “For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). God’s face is turned away from sin, He will not look upon it, He will not come into contact with it, He will not hear it. Notice God’s response when Israel sinned.

Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

God could have saved, but they separated themselves from God. The result was that his face was hid from them and God would not hear them. His holy nature could not associate with their sin. This is also the reason we are told repeatedly that sin brings death (Eze. 18:4, 20; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1; Jam. 1:15). Death is simply a separation; physical death is a separation of body and spirit (Jam. 2:26), and spiritual death is a sep-

aration from God. Sin brings spiritual death and thus separation from God as expressed in Isaiah. Being separated from God in a state of spiritual death, He will not hear the sinner who prays.

THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE

God gave explicit instructions for the making of first the tabernacle and later the temple. God told Moses concerning the tabernacle: "And look that thou make *them* after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount" (Exo. 25:40). The pattern God showed Moses was a shadow or a type of the church (see Heb. 8-10). While not going into a detailed study of the wonderful parallel between the two, let us notice that which God established.

The tabernacle was surrounded by an outer court. Inside this court on the eastern-most end stood the brazen altar or altar of burnt offerings. Just a little west of that was the brazen laver used by the priest for various washings. In the western part of the court was the tabernacle proper divided into two compartments separated by a veil. The first compartment was the holy place in which there were three pieces of furniture. On the north side was the table of shewbread which had twelve loaves of unleaven bread on it. On the south side was the golden candlestick or lampstand. It had a central stem with three curved branches on each side. Then in front of the veil was the altar of incense or golden altar. Inside the veil was the most holy place or the holy of holies. It contained the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark was the testimony of the Lord and then later a pot of manna along with Aaron's rod that budded. On top of the ark was the mercy seat and at each end was a cherub. The cherubim were facing each other with their wings stretched forth and covering the mercy seat. This physical tabernacle was only temporary and pointed to a greater and more perfect tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man.

The true tabernacle concerns the church of our Lord. God established the tabernacle to correspond to the church. Let us briefly consider the parallels between the tabernacle and the church. The court represents the world; the holy place represents the church; and the most holy place is the dwelling place of God or heaven. The brazen altar, which is in the court, represents the cross where the Lamb of God shed His blood for man's sins (Gal. 1:4; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 7:26-27; et al). The brazen laver represents baptism where we wash ourselves clean from our sins and then

are qualified to enter into the tabernacle (Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5; et al.).

When we enter the holy place (which represents the church) we have three pieces of furniture. The first is the candlestick which the priests were to keep burning brightly before the Lord. The candlestick apparently has a twofold application: the Word of God which gives light to the church (Psa. 119:105, 130; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:19; et al); the light Christians are to have before a darkened world (Mat. 5:13-16; Eph. 5:8; Rev. 2:5; et al). On the opposite side was the table of shewbread which represents the Lord's supper (Mat. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; 1 Cor. 11:20-29; et al). Then, before the veil was the altar of incense. This represents the prayers of the saints. The golden altar was the closest to the dwelling place of God; the closest approach to the most holy place. The high priest took it into the most holy place when he entered on the day of atonement. The Scriptures clearly state that this represents the prayers of the saints. John writes, "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints" (Rev. 5:8). *Odours* as translated by the King James means "incense" as translated in the American Standard and New King James. Later Inspiration adds:

And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, *which came* with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand (Rev. 8:3-4).

God placed the altar of incense in the holy place, not in the court. The altar represents prayers and the holy place represents the church. Thus, prayers can only be by those in the church. To take prayers and place them in the court (the world) is to violate what God established. Whose prayers does God hear? Those who are in the court or those who are in the Lord's church. No one has the right to take that which God placed in the church and apply it to the world.

THE APPROACH TO THE FATHER

Jesus was giving comfort to His apostles when He tells them that He is going away to prepare a place for them and that they know the way. Thomas said they did not know where He was going or the way. Jesus

responded: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). There is no way any man can go to the Father except he goes through Christ. Paul puts the same principle this way: "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). Christ is the way and the **only** way to the Father. The **only** ones who would thus have that access to the Father are those who are in Christ. Those who are not in Christ (Christians) would have no way to have access to the Father. Thus, God does not hear a sinner's prayer.

Closely akin to this, the Hebrews' writer states concerning Jesus: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). Christ makes intercession for those who have been saved by Him. He does not make intercession for the world or those in the world. Yet, if the prayers of those in the world were heard, Christ would also be making intercession for them.

OTHER TEACHINGS

The apostles asked Jesus to teach them to pray. "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). Jesus then gives the model prayer (what others have erroneously called the Lord's prayer). Our Lord begins that model prayer with these words: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Mat. 6:9; Luke 11:2). He taught that we are to address our prayers to the Father who is in heaven. Who has God as a Father? Only a child of God! Those who are not children of God have Satan as their father. Christ stated to the Jews of His day:

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

A person who is outside of Christ does not have the right to call upon the Father in heaven because He is not his father. Only a child of God can pray to the Father in heaven.

Paul teaches that all spiritual blessings are in Christ: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). *In heavenly*

places has reference to the church. Thus, all spiritual blessings are in Christ in the church. The same act that places one in Christ places one in the church. There are only two passages which teach how we get into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27): both state we are baptized into Christ. Yet, when one is baptized, God places him in the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Thus when one gets into Christ, he is in the church. The question we are now concerned with is: Is prayer a physical or spiritual blessing? While there might be some physical blessings and results associated with prayer, it is primarily a spiritual blessing. Thus, if we have the right to take prayer out of the church and out of being in Christ, then we have the right to take any spiritual blessing out of Christ and the church. Prayer is for those who have qualified themselves by becoming a Christian (one who is in the church of Christ). Those outside of Christ (who are not members of the church of Christ) have no right of prayer.

Peter discusses the husband wife relationship in 1 Peter 3. Specifically he deals with wives who are married to an unbelieving husband and how the wife should act toward him. He then turns his attention to the husbands and directs them how to live with their wives. He says:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7).

How and why could their prayers be hindered? They will be hindered when the husband and wife both are not “heirs together of the grace of life,” or when both are not Christians. Why are they hindered then? Because when the one who is a non-Christian prays, his prayers are not heard by God.

EXCLUSION PRINCIPLE

While the exclusion principle is often misused, there is a proper use of this principle. God authorizes by what He says, not by what He does not say. We only have the right to do that which God authorizes (Mat. 21:23-27; Col. 3:17) through the Scriptures. The Scriptures authorize by (1) direct statements, (2) implications, (3) examples. When there is no authorization for it, then we cannot do it. The Hebrews’ writer uses this principle to show that Jesus is greater than the angels.

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?...But to which of the angels said he at any time,

Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? (Heb. 1:5, 13).

Since God never said this to any angel, it shows Christ's superiority over them. Since God does apply it to Jesus and never applies it to angels, it excludes angels.

When we consider the law of exclusion in connection with prayer, every statement, implication, and example concerning prayer in the Bible, Old and New Testament, is applied to the child of God. There is simply no passage that applies the privilege or blessing of prayer to anyone other than a child of God. To take prayer and apply it to anyone other than whom God applies it to is wrong. We simply have no right to apply it to anyone but a child of God.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

I Know I Have Been Heard

There are some who will proudly boast that they know that their prayers have been heard. This claim relies solely upon ones feelings, which is like the person who says: "I know I am saved." How do they know? Because they feel it in their heart. However, as we all know, feelings are not a safe guide in religion or anything else in life.

Joseph's brothers took his coat of many colors and dipped it in blood. They brought the coat to Jacob; Jacob felt that his son had been killed and said he would go to his grave mourning for his son. However, as we all know, Jacob's feelings were not reliable; Joseph was not dead. Saul (the apostle Paul) had done many things contrary to the name of Christ.

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities (Acts 26:9-11).

Yet, in spite of all the evil Saul had done as he stood before the council, he would say, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Paul had done many things contrary to the cause of Christ, but he did it with a good conscience. His conscience (feelings) was not a safe guide, just like our feelings are not a safe guide.

The fact that God has been good to one who is not a Christian and certain events have transpired in their life that have brought blessings to them rather than the continuation of evil (and maybe they have prayed about it) does not mean that God heard or answered those prayers. Consider the words of Jesus: “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat. 5:45). All men drink in God’s physical blessings, not just Christians. Simply because a person enjoys God’s physical blessings does not mean that God approves or accepts them or hears their prayers.

Saul

As we have just noticed, Saul was a persecutor and injurious to the way of Christ until Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Saul went into Damascus to submit himself to the will of the Lord. While he was in Damascus and prior to Ananias coming to him: “And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink” (Acts 9:9). When Jesus is speaking to Ananias, He tells him: “Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11). Saul was not a child of God, yet the Lord told Ananias that he was praying.

This situation is special, to say the least, concerning which everyone is in agreement. You cannot take a special situation and make it applicable to all. The Lord appeared to Saul in a blinding light; should we all expect the Lord to appear to us in a blinding light? No, Saul is a special case. The same would be true of his praying. Even if God heard his prayers, we cannot take this special case and make it applicable to others.

Simply because God knew that Saul was praying does not mean that God heard or accepted that prayer. There is nothing in the context to indicate that God heard (accepted) Saul’s prayer. God knew that Saul was in Damascus, that he was fasting, that he was in need of salvation, et al., but that does not mean that God accepted him. God knows all things because He is omnipresent: “The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro. 15:3). However, because God knows all things does not mean that He approves all things. When we are speaking of God’s hearing prayers, we are talking about His approving or accepting them. While God knew what Saul was doing, it does not mean that He heard Saul’s prayer in the sense of accepting them.

Since Saul was a Jew, it would have been natural and logical for him to pray. As a Jew faithful to the Law of Moses, he would have been expected to pray and had the right to pray, prior to the Gospel of Christ coming into effect. Saul was accustomed to prayer and believed in it. However, it is pure assumption to say God heard (accepted or approved) his prayers—and it is an assumption which contradicts God's Word. Even if the assumption were true, it is a special case and cannot be applied to anyone else.

Cornelius

The Lord appeared to Cornelius in Acts 10: "And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). The usual approach is that Cornelius was not a child of God, Peter was sent to him to show him what to do to be saved. It was not until later that he obeyed the gospel and became a child of God. Thus, we have one who is not a child of God whose prayers are heard by God. Thus, some conclude that as long as one is searching for the truth that God will hear his prayers. However, this interpretation is contrary to all we know in the Scriptures. Then, simply because God is faithful to what He says means that God will not hear the non-Christians prayer. God has said:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened (Mat. 7:7-8).

God being faithful to this promise does not mean that He hears the prayers of someone who is not His child.

What was said of Saul can also be said of Cornelius: it is a special case. The gospel was for all men everywhere. However, the gospel had not yet been taken to the Gentiles. God had established an order to take the gospel into the world. "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). We see the progression as Jesus said:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Now God was showing it is time to take the gospel to the "uttermost part of the earth." Thus, God appears to Cornelius and to Peter to show the

Gentiles are now to have the gospel preached to them. Thus, this is a special case and cannot be applied to anyone else.

It is this author's conviction that we do Cornelius an injustice. Many boldly state that Cornelius was lost and not a child of God: this conclusion may not be correct. God says that he is *devout*, which expresses one who has been approved by the Law of God. The Record also states that he *feared God* which indicates that he is doing God's will. From all the information in the Bible concerning Cornelius, he was one who was in a right relationship with God. How can this be?

Let us consider the three dispensations. The first of those is the Patriarchal Period which began at Adam. This is the period in which the oldest father in the family served as the prophet (spokesman) for God and as the priest for his family (making sacrifices for the sins). If they accepted the law which their fathers revealed, then they were approved of God and would have the right of prayer. The second period is the Mosaic period. This is the law given to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. It was never given to all mankind but only to the Jews. It was added (Gal. 3:19) to the law of Patriarchy. When the Jews were faithful to that law of Moses, then they were in a right relationship with God and would have the right of prayer. All Gentiles (non-Jews) remained under the Patriarchal law while the Jew was under the Mosaic Law.

When Christ died on the cross He abolished, nullified, or did away with both laws. The Law of Christ came into being, which is a law given to all mankind. The application of what Jesus did was not seen for the Jew until fifty days later for the Jew on Pentecost in Acts 2.² During those fifty days a Jew would have remained in a right relation with God if he remained faithful to the Law of Moses. The Law of Christ had not yet taken effect for the Jew until Pentecost. The application of what Jesus did was not seen for the Gentile until Cornelius (Acts 10). During that time (between Christ's death and Cornelius), if a person was faithful to the Law of God given through the fathers (Patriarchal Law), then he would have been in a right relation with God and thus have the right to pray.³ This is the condition we find Cornelius. He was in a right relation with God, having the right to pray, because he remained faithful to the Patriarchal Law. Now the Law of Christ was coming into effect for the Gentile, and he needed to hear the Word of Christ and obey it to be saved.

Cornelius' prayers had come up as a memorial (remembrance) to God of the great promise He had made to Abraham, that all families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:1-3). Now it was going to be brought to pass: the Gentiles will also be blessed through the promised seed of Abraham. Thus, Cornelius had the right to pray. He was not a Christian, but he was in a right relation to God (a child of God) by being faithful to the law to which he was subject: the Patriarchal Law, until the Law of Christ became applicable to him. He then had to obey the gospel and become a Christian.

CONCLUSION

We, as Christians, have been given a wonderful gift—the right of having our prayers heard by a loving heavenly Father and knowing that He will answer. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22). Far too few Christians take advantage of the gift God has given to us. However, this is a gift that only the Christian has access to. The person who is outside of Christ does not have the right to pray.

Sadly, there are those who teach that those who are not Christians need to pray to become such. Sadly, all those who have been deceived by such teaching along with the teachers are going to be lost. God will not hear the sinner's prayer. To be saved one must obey the Truth. Upon one's obedience to the Doctrine of Christ, he then has the right to pray, and God will hear.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²A biblical example of this principle is found in Hebrews 2:14. Through Jesus' death He destroyed Satan and death. Yet, Paul reveals the Christ “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death” (1 Cor. 15:25-26). While Christ destroyed Satan and death, the effect of what He did at the cross (destroying Satan and death) will not be seen till the second coming.

³There is no one today in this type of situation. The Gospel was preached to every creature (Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:23). Therefore, all men today are subject to the Law of Christ.

UNCONCERNED WITH SIN

1 CORINTHIANS 5:2

Michael Light



Michael Light is a native of Beeville, Texas, and is married to the former Carrie Brown. They have two daughters, Shelby Elizabeth and Michaela Ashley. Michael is a 1991 graduate of the Southwest School of Bible Studies and received his B.A. degree from Southwest Texas State University. He is currently completing his thesis toward his M.A. in Roman Military History. Michael preached for the Northside congregation in New Braunfels for five years and is in his fifth year as the evangelist for the church in Bangs, Texas. He has been involved in overseas campaigns in England, Jamaica, Tobago, and Russia. He has held meetings and preached on lectureships in various states, as well as published several tracts and edited one sermon outline book. He

is also a founding editor of the quarterly religious journal, *Seek Ye First*.

INTRODUCTION

There are truly hundreds of sad statements in the Bible, all of which should teach the honest student of God's holy Writ something about what types of actions are and are not acceptable to God. This series of studies should indeed be a rich addition to books written in the vein of warning of unacceptable behavior. Our assignment is to notice the statement pertaining to the lack of concern with sin as noted in the events surrounding 1 Corinthians 5:2.

We certainly live in a society which is unconcerned with sin. Our daily news reports are constant reminders of the calloused heart we as a people have developed. Babies are killed and thrown in trash cans at high school proms, and no one really seems to care. Abortions of every imaginable type are performed by the hundreds per day, and we call it a *choice* and a woman's *right*. Most anything can and will be done for money, regardless of its vile nature. Prostitution, venereal diseases, drunkenness, drug abuse, pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, homosexuality, violence, pornography, disrespectful attitudes, etc., abound, and no one seems to care. Few offer any comment and those who do seem bent on either justifying the actions or "passing the buck" to someone else.

We have been convinced that there is something wrong with those who oppose the actions of anyone else. Fear of being seen as judgmental and prejudiced has petrified many into inaction. Men and women who know better seem unwilling (perhaps unconcerned) to risk being chastened for standing for what is right.

DISCUSSION

As noted previously, **our nation seems to be completely oblivious to the existence of sin.** Most, certainly, do not even act as though sin really exists. When is the last time you heard someone on a major network use *sin* when talking about some social problem of injustice? We all know they simply ignore the *sin* aspect of what has been done. Why?

Some, no doubt, simply are ignorant of sin's existence. Most of us may find this hard to believe, yet it is true. My wife had a friend (from Korea) who used to attend services with her while they were in high school. After listening to one particular sermon where the preacher was really condemning *sin*, she asked my wife: "What is sin?" This young lady was extremely intelligent, spoke several languages, went on to graduate from the University of Texas, yet, had never even heard of sin. Ignorance has and will condemn untold millions.

Hosea 4:6-7 still states:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. As they were increased, so they sinned against me: *therefore* will I change their glory into shame.¹

Notice the progression. God tells the people that because they had rejected the knowledge that comes from Him they would be condemned. Notice the second verse gets more specific. Due to their ignorance, they were destined to commit (multiply) sin. When one grows ignorant of God's will, one is of necessity going to make many grievous mistakes. If we do not know God's Word, we cannot know His will. And if we do not know His will, we certainly cannot do it.

Others are unconcerned with sin due to apathy. The attitude of neglectfulness has always led to spiritual disaster. Many today are not necessarily against God in any sort of conscious way, yet practically speaking they are. Jesus noted in Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." These

should be rather sobering words to those who see themselves as mere spectators in the realm of religion. Christ makes it clear there is no room for “fence straddling” in life. If we are not on the side of the Lord, we are automatically on the side of Satan.

Apathy, perhaps sums up what is wrong with the moral fiber in our country today. Most people just do not care. They give lip service to the Lord and to what is right. But usually their actions fall far short of those of people who are truly concerned.

Still others are not concerned due to possession of rebellious hearts. Many dare God or anyone else to condemn their actions. If a person or a religious organization becomes pro-active on a moral issue, there seems to be no end to those who will defiantly thumb their noses at God’s Word and belittle anyone who dares call their actions into question.

Rebellion has always been a huge hurdle over which man must come if he is to serve God. It is fostered by arrogance and a lack of submissiveness, which is precisely the key element needed for one to be humbled before Jehovah. In the Garden of Eden it was rebellion that led Adam and Eve into sin. They were unwilling to trust God’s instructions and revolted. In 1 Samuel 15 we read of the fall of king Saul. The instructions had been clear. He was to kill all of the Amalakites as well as their livestock. He did neither. He spared the life of their king as well as some of the better livestock. During Samuel’s scathing rebuke of Saul he stated:

Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. **For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king** (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

It is of great import that though Saul did most of what God had instructed, his disobedience was viewed as rebellion by God. Most today would argue that Saul did most of what God said do and was therefore at least somewhat obedient. But such is not the case. Partial obedience equals disobedience. The sin was great enough to warrant his removal from being king. He lost his throne, his glory, his place of honor, and ultimately his life and soul.

There are those who simply do not care what God has to say on any subject. Noah preached for about a hundred years to a crowd who would not repent. The same was true of those who occupied the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. There are those who are bent on doing what they desire even when they know it is wrong. For example, everyone in this country knows that smoking is bad for the body (including those who smoke). We know there are several diseases, many of which are fatal, caused or expedited by smoking. Yet, even with this knowledge, people insist on smoking. We as a people have the capacity to reject what we know to be right, wholesome, and good, and to do that which we know will hurt us. This is rebellion. When it comes to God and His Word, the consequences are far worse than death, the consequences are eternal damnation. Even knowing this, there are still those who will run head-long into the pit of hell.

But the fact remains, **sin is a terrible reality for which judgment will come.** The Bible unequivocally teaches the existence of sin and its consequences. Whether the world wants to admit it or not, sin is a reality. Romans 3:23 states: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” When God created mankind, He gave us a choice as to how we would act (Gen. 3:2-6). Sin is the act of breaking God’s laws, through either omission (not doing what God wants us to) or commission (doing what God has forbidden). In 1 John 3:4 we read, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” When we go contrary to God’s Word (law) we sin, whether we are aware of it or not. The Bible not only teaches that we all sin, it also teaches we will give an account for how we have lived.

There is a day of reckoning coming. The Hebrews writer noted: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Paul pointed out in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.” In Matthew 25 we find three descriptions of the great day of judgment. Jesus spoke of ten virgins, three men who received various talents, and a division of sheep and goats. In all three cases there were people ill-prepared in the day of judgment. In every case Jesus clearly points out the doom awaiting those who (for what ever reason) are not

ready when He comes to separate His followers from those who follow Satan.

There is no such thing as neutrality in the area of religion. Either we are Christians or else we are not. If we are not followers of Christ, we are His enemies. Many people would not see themselves as the Lord's enemies, but He defines all non-disciples as His enemies. Notice Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." One does not have to be a rank hedonist to be against Christ. Simply refusing to submit to Him and His will is enough to gain one the classification of an enemy of Jesus. James 4:4 adds: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." We cannot allow material concerns to get between us and God (Mat. 6:24). Later James writes:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoyce in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin (Jam. 4:13-17).

No doubt, untold millions will meet the day of judgment ill-prepared, even oblivious to their dark future away from the presence of God. The fact of the horrors of hell should help motivate us in the church to labor tirelessly to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). Paul would say relative to this: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

However, the good news of the gospel is that God's Word offers the answer for sin. From the initial fall in the garden, God had a plan to save mankind from the sin problem. In Genesis 3:15 God promised: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." God's plan involved selecting a people through whom He could bring into the world a Savior, which was accomplished through the Jewish nation.

Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a cruel death, and was resurrected that we might have hope of eternal life through Him. In Matthew 26:28 we read: "For this is my blood of the new testament,

which is shed for many for the remission of sins” He lost His life that we might gain ours. The New Testament is quite clear as to what one must do to be saved. First, one must hear: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Second, one must believe: “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Third, one must repent: “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Fourth, one must confess: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). Fifth, one must be baptized for the remission of sins: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). And finally, one must remain faithful: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Most religions (and not a few brethren) also seem to be unconcerned with sin. As strange as this may sound, it is undoubtedly true. Most will preach nothing but a “social gospel.” These people are more concerned with the distribution of soap and soup than with the teaching of the unadulterated gospel. There seem to be precious few preachers who will stand up and preach the “whole counsel of God.” When the gospel is watered down or neglected in what is preached, the hearers are literally robbed of the only avenue they have to come to God. For when the Word is not taught in its fullness, men remain in ignorance, such damns souls (Hos. 4:6). Without a firm grasp of God’s Word, religious people are destined to miss the mark. Paul wrote:

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3).

Another way the religious world manifests its lack of concern for sin and its consequences is by teaching false doctrines concerning salvation. In essence, they preach a lie, by which untold millions of souls are duped into believing they are saved, when in reality they are not. Concerning our

subject (being unconcerned with sin) notice the following two false theories which serve as deceivers of the masses.

Universalism is a false doctrine that manifests a lack of biblical concern for sin. The problem with this doctrine is that it simply is not true. The Bible does not teach Universalism. In John 8:24 Jesus stated, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." The fact that Jesus ties salvation to belief in Him, implies that damnation awaits some (hence, disproving Universalism). Acts 4:12 similarly says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Again Matthew 7:21 makes it crystal clear that not everyone is going to be saved. First Corinthians 6:9-11 and Galatians 5:19-21 specifically list some sins that will insure the damnation of some. All of the above passages explicitly or implicitly teach that some people will be lost. Therefore, Universalism is contrary to the Bible, thus, false.

"Faith Only" is another doctrine that clearly shows no true regard for what the Scriptures teach regarding the remedy for sin and therefore is in actuality another manifestation of a lack of concern for sin. Just as Universalism is without scriptural basis, so is "faith only." Every verse that teaches the necessity of more than faith stands as proof that "faith only" is a heretical doctrine. For instance, Acts 17:30 relates: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." This verse, along with Luke 13:3, 5, clearly states that repentance is obligatory prior to one's sins being forgiven. The same is true of passages which teach the essentiality of baptism such as Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4, et al.

We could discuss the doctrine of "once saved always saved," but these should suffice as examples of the religious hypocrisy and lack of true concern for the devastating price sin extracts on the masses. These doctrines and those who espouse them succeed in making men comfortable in their sins. And comfortable sinners never will be compelled to seek the way of salvation. This is one of the primary reasons we who do love the truth must never tire of destroying every ounce of influence the false teachers of Satan's doctrines have in the world.

Regardless of what the world thinks, God is concerned with sin, and so must we His faithful followers be. We cannot call ourselves Christians

(followers of Christ) and not follow in His steps relative to trying to seek and save the lost. Sin separates man from God. Isaiah the prophet said:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But **your iniquities have separated between you and your God**, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Sin enslaves us (Rom. 1:21-32), brings reproach (Pro. 14:34), brings spiritual death (Rom. 6:23), and ultimately destruction (2 The. 1:7-9).

God showed the seriousness of sin in several ways, the most graphic being the sacrifice of His only begotten Son Jesus the Christ. God worked providentially for centuries to bring about the birth of Jesus at just the right time (Gal. 4:4). Christ came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. In Matthew 26:28 He affirmed that His blood was necessary if forgiveness was to occur. We should respect God's wishes and develop an attitude that imitates His concerning those who are lost. Peter summed it up this way: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). If we love God, we will love what He loves, namely the souls of men.

Finally, we should be concerned with sin because a devil's hell awaits those who die lost (Mat. 25:41, 46). We should strive with all our might to save as many as possible. The question we should be asking ourselves is: "**Are we concerned with sin?**" If so, what are we doing about it?

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“SO SOON REMOVED”

GALATIANS 1:6-9

Noah Hackworth



Noah A. Hackworth was born in Oklahoma but grew up in California. He is married to the former Glenda Nunley, and they have three children. He was educated in California colleges with a major in Speech and pursued Advanced Biblical Studies from Pepperdine, continuing under a private tutor.

Noah completed thirty years of work with the church of Christ in San Mateo, California. In 1996, he resigned the work in San Mateo and accepted the work at the West Visalia Church of Christ in Visalia, California. Presently, he is Co-Director of the Annual Greater Visalia Lectures. He has preached and/or held meetings in ten states. He has made two trips to Singapore and three trips to Ethiopia to preach the Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

The gospel was preached in the region of Galatia on all three of Paul’s missionary journeys (Acts 13:14; 16:6; 18:23). However, he apparently had not visited Galatia before his first preaching tour. At the completion of the second journey, the apostle returned to Syrian Antioch and spent some time there (Acts 18:22). But on the third journey he “departed and went through the region of Galatia, and Phrygia, in order, establishing all the disciples” (Acts 18:23), which indicates that churches were already in existence. The Galatian epistle differs from many of Paul’s other epistles in that it is not addressed to a single church (cf., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phi. 1:1; Col. 1:2), but to *churches*; the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2). Written from Corinth, possibly about A.D. 57, Paul himself tells us some things about the Galatians. **They were foolish.** “O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?” (Gal. 3:1).¹ **They apparently lacked determination.** “Ye were running well; who hindered you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal. 5:7). **They were easily persuaded.** “This persuasion *came* not of him that calleth you” (Gal. 5:8). **They were unsettled.**

I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel; which is not another *gospel* only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ (1:6-7).

Whether this action occurred on the first or second journey is difficult to tell, but it does not alter the fact that a spiritual defection was in progress. Tenney observes:

The language of 1:6 indicates surprise on Paul's part that the defection had come as quickly as it had. The text does not say whether Paul had observed the defection while present in Galatia and had written the letter after leaving, or whether he wrote because of news that had been brought to him. The latter seems to be the case; for in 3:1 he says, "Who did bewitch you?" as though he were unacquainted personally with those responsible for the schism. If Paul means "so quickly" (1:6) that the Galatians' lapse came shortly after their initial conversion, then it may well be that upon returning to Antioch he learned of the sad state of affairs, and wrote this letter to check the drift toward legalism.²

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

To grasp the full significance of *so quickly removing* we need to expound the passage wherein the statement is found. The word **marvel** translates the word *thaumazo* which expresses "wonder." Henry Alford says:

Is a word of mildness, inasmuch as it imports that better things were expected of them,—and of condescension, as letting down the writer to the level of his readers and even challenging explanation from them. Still, like many other such mild words, it carries to the guilty conscience even sharper rebuke than a harsher one would.³

So quickly translates *tacheos* which expresses "suddenness or rashness." The word is duplicated in 1 Timothy 5:22 where Paul says, "Lay hands hastily on no man," which may refer to the haste sometimes present in the appointment of elders. **Removing** (removed, KJV) is from *metatithes*, which involves transference, removal, desertion; the word is present passive showing that the defection was not complete but was in progress, as in the case of the foolish virgins whose lights had not "gone out" but was in the process of "going out" (Mat. 25:8). *Metatithes* has military, political, religious, and philosophical connotations. **Called** is from *kalesantos*; it is aorist and points to the time when the gospel was received. The Galatians had been duped by someone into thinking that

there was another gospel, but this possibility was false. Paul used two words, with which the Galatians were familiar, to prove that there was only one gospel. They are *allos* and *heteros*. *Allos* expresses a numerical difference and denotes another of the same sort; *heteros* expresses a qualitative difference and denotes another of a different sort (cf., John 14:16; Rom. 7:23; Acts 7:18). Paul speaks of a “different gospel (*heteros*) which is not another (*allos*, another like the one he preached).”⁴

THE IMPLICATIONS OF “SO SOON REMOVED”

People who are indifferent to the actions of others are unaffected by what they do, but when those we love involve themselves in a dangerous activity or procedure it is not only a matter of great concern to us but is quite often the cause of no little sadness. If we put ourselves in Paul’s place, if we have become all things to all men, if we have been willing to “spend and be spent” in the Cause of Christ, we will see and understand why the Galatian defection was such a surprise to the apostle and why it was such a matter of great concern to him. Waiting for Christ to be *formed* in the hearts of the people to whom he wrote and knowing that the only way this could be effected was through the teaching he provided for them put the apostle in travail again, which suggests that he had experienced these kinds of feelings before. Here, Paul draws on a woman’s experience in childbirth to describe his feelings. To witness the abandonment of Christ by anyone saddens the heart, because such action results in the loss of the soul.

The Rejection of Jesus Christ

Before the very eyes of the Galatians, fully exposed to their view, Jesus Christ had been “openly set forth” (portrayed) by the apostle. “Openly set forth” or “portrayed” translates *proergraphe* of which Reinecker says, “The word was used to describe all public notices or proclamations and indicates a public announcement in which the validity of a particular fact or a particular condition is proclaimed.”⁵ The fact of Christ’s crucifixion had been undeniably proclaimed to the Galatians. They had become sons of God through obedience to **the faith** (Gal. 3:26), and yet they were, when Paul wrote, in the process of defection. Their action, in this sense, was related to the apostasy described by the Hebrew epistle. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26). The sin of the Galatians, like the Hebrews, was willful, i.e., *willingly*,

intentionally, for so the word *hekousios* implies. Religious apostasy is always a choice. It most often occurs when one takes his eyes off Jesus in contemplation of his surroundings, as in the case of Peter who had begun to walk on the water. He saw the tempest around him instead of seeing Jesus in front of him; he consequently began to sink in the water (Mat. 14:29-30). The formation of Christ within the Galatians referred to the complete development of a real Christ-like character in their hearts; Christ had not been completely formed or shaped in them. The formation of Christ within any individual starts with the mind. There must be a change of mind; when there is a change of the mind, there will be a change of the will. It is because of this that Paul stated: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 2:5—KJV). A Christ-like personality cannot be developed in any other way.

Wasted Labor

"I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain" (Gal. 4:11), said Paul. "Bestowed labor" is the translation of *kekopiaka* which "draws attention to what Paul fears may be the permanent result of his past efforts."⁶ If the Galatian activity continued (based upon *removing*), it would unquestionably result in complete apostasy. The labour of the apostle would have been for nothing. The same kind of situation is encountered in his work among the Thessalonians. He inquired about their faith, "lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain" (1 The. 3:5). Neither the Thessalonian nor the Galatian situation represented a *flaw* in the gospel, or the teaching done by Paul. The problem was in the parties themselves and was based upon their attitude toward the gospel. The apostle described a similar circumstance in Corinth.

According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

If the subject matter is retained by one who is taught, the teacher shall receive a reward; but if through carelessness and neglect the one taught defects from the truth, he will be lost but the teacher himself shall be saved. Though the years many gospel preachers have found themselves facing this kind of situation; some of those taught did not remain faithful; they defected and hence will be lost if they remain aloof from Christ. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain only if we remain steadfast and unmoveable (cf., 1 Cor. 15:58).

The Abuse of Freedom

The fact that the Galatians were “so soon removing” themselves from Christ was occasioned in part by the abuse of their freedom in Christ. This abuse of freedom is reflected in two critical passages. “For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). “For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only *use* not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13). These brethren had been delivered from the law of Moses and were free to serve Christ, but they were not free to turn their liberty into license. There was, in the time of the Galatians, as well as in our own time, a brand of lawlessness known as Antinomianism, the advocates of which are opposed to any form of restraint. Freedom in Christ did not mean the freedom to do whatever was desired, but freedom to do what is right. The Galatians were obviously influenced by such lawlessness and were warned by the apostle not to use their “freedom for an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

The idea is, “You are called to liberty, but it is not liberty for an occasion to the flesh. It is not freedom from virtuous restraints, and from the laws of God. It is liberty from the servitude of sin, and religious rites and ceremonies, not freedom from the necessary restraints of virtue.” It was necessary to give this caution, because (1) There was a strong tendency in all converts from heathenism to relapse again into their former habits. Licentiousness abounded, and where they had been addicted to it before their conversion, and where they were surrounded by it on every hand, they were in constant danger of falling into it again. A bare and naked declaration, therefore that they had been called to *liberty*, to freedom from restraint, might have been misunderstood, and some might have supposed that they were free from *all* restraints. (2) It is needful to guard the doctrine from abuse at all times. There has been a strong tendency, as the history of the church has shown, to abuse the doctrine of grace. The doctrine that Christians are “free;” that there is liberty to them from

restraint has been perverted always by Antinomians, and been made the occasion of their indulging freely in sin. And the result has shown that nothing was more important than to guard the doctrine of *Christian liberty*, and to show exactly what Christians are *freed from*, and what laws are still binding on them. Paul is, therefore, at great pains to show that the doctrine which he has maintained did not lead to licentiousness, and did not allow the indulgence of sinful and corrupt passions.⁷

Severed from Christ

To the Galatians Paul said, "Ye are severed from Christ" (Gal. 5:4). "Ye were discharged from Christ"; "Ye are brought to naught"; "Ye have been separated from"; for so is the meaning of *katergethete* and *katargeo*. Concerning the latter Vine says:

To reduce to inactivity...the aorist tense indicates that point of time at which there was an acceptance of the Judaistic doctrines; to those who accepted these Christ would be of no profit, they were as branches severed from the tree.

The idea contained in "discharged from" or "severed from" is further illustrated in Romans 7:2, where Paul says, concerning a woman who has been loosed from her husband by his death: "She has been discharged [*katergetai*] from the law of the husband." The fact that the Galatians were so soon removing themselves from Christ indicated a "severance" or "discharge" from Christ, but such is the case! Spiritual life is found only within the one who stays connected to Christ. The Lord said:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit. Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing (John 15:1-5).

Justification by Law

The law was actually a good thing (Rom. 7:12), but it could not justify. Why? Because it could neither be sinlessly kept nor provide actual forgiveness. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Paul argues thus: (1) There was something the law could not do; (2) The reason the law

could not do what it was supposed to do was that it was weak in the flesh; (3) God did what the law could not do; and (4) God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh. Some of the Galatians were trying to justify themselves by the law, for so *dikaiousthe* and *dikaioo* imply. “The present tense is connative indicating an attempt ‘you are trying to be justified.’”⁸ The Galatians stood condemned because they were trying to justify themselves through law.

The Inadequacy of the Gospel

That the gospel is God’s power to save man is unequivocally affirmed by Paul (Rom. 1:16), and to the Galatians he certainly would not affirm otherwise, for he taught the same things in every church (1 Cor. 4:17). Yet the Galatians seemed to have been persuaded by false teachers that the gospel was inadequate to save.

The basic issue of the epistle to the Galatian churches was to affirm the divine origin of the gospel of Christ that was preached by the apostle Paul. It appears evident that the churches of Galatia had been subjected to teaching that either made the gospel secondary to the law of Moses or merely an appendage thereto. The contention being made by false teachers that for one to become a child of God he must conform to the former law, especially circumcision. The force and adequacy of the gospel was attacked by an attack upon the apostleship of Paul and the source of authority of the message he preached. The Galatian Christians were being led away from the gospel by discrediting the preaching of Paul....This letter was written to prevent these Christians from falling away from Christ by causing them to understand the superiority and sufficiency of the faith; by causing them to see the contrast between it and any other system, Mosiac or otherwise, that was inadequate and abolished; by causing them to grasp the relationship between the faith of Christ and the promises God had given to Abraham that would affect all mankind. In this way Paul not only hoped to prevent further erosion from the faith, but to restore those who had succumbed to this false teaching.⁹

Concerning the gospel, Romans 1:17 affirms: “For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith.” Transposed, this means: “For a righteousness of God is revealed in it [in the gospel].” The way God makes men righteous is revealed in the gospel (cf., Rom. 10:3). The Galatians had been woefully misinformed. They had been made to believe that righteousness had been made possible by keeping the law.

The Divine Origin of the Gospel Rejected

A rejection of divine revelation was also responsible for the rapid removal of the Galatians from the gospel of Christ. In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul sets forth and defends the divine origin of the gospel. He affirms:

For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but *it came to me* through revelation of Jesus Christ.

Both Paul's apostolic credentials and the gospel of Christ were of heavenly origin, and the apostle defends them as such in the following manner. He uses the words *apo* and *dia* to establish his case for both the divine origination of his apostleship and the gospel. *Apo* is indicative of ultimate source, while *dia* indicates agency. Neither Paul's credentials as an apostle or the gospel were of men relative to source and transmission. The Galatians unfortunately had been duped by false teachers into thinking otherwise. The instructions given to the Corinthians would be timely for the Galatians. In fact, some of the same verbiage is used.

Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain (1 Cor. 15:1-3).

Paul uses the word *gnorizo* in both the Galatian and the Corinthian passages. The word is used to draw attention to a fact and to introduce a solemn statement.¹⁰ The apostle had preached the gospel to both parties. Both had received it; both were saved by it, but the Galatians did not "hold fast the word"; they had, consequently, at least some of them, believed in vain.

CAUSES OF APOSTASY

Past statistics, though perhaps outdated now, suggested that within seven years subsequent to conversion a great percentage, perhaps as high as fifty percent, fell away from the faith. Apostasy is a consequence of several variables, but we never have to wonder what they are. Paul makes them unmistakably plain with his use of *rhetos* "expressly" which involves accuracy, precision, and clarity.

But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of

demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

To put it perhaps more literally: “Now the Spirit in words says.” There is a context here which must be noted, but the causes attributed to apostasy have through the years remained unchanged.

Seducing Spirits

Seducing spirits stand in absolute contrast to the Holy Spirit. Seducing spirits are misleading spirits, for *so pneumasin planois* indicates. Seducing spirits are evil men who lead others astray. This is obviously the reason why John said, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The church in Thyatira had a problem with a woman called Jezebel. The Lord said:

But I have *this* against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20).

This wicked woman was given over to seduction. She had seduced (*plana*—“deceived”) some of the Lord’s people in Thyatira, but there is no greater biblical example of spiritual seduction than that of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah.

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned five and fifty years in Jerusalem: and his mother’s name was Hephzibah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, after the abominations of the nations whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made an Asherah, as did Ahab king of Israel, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of Jehovah, whereof Jehovah said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah. And he made his son to pass through the fire, and practised augury, and used enchantments, and dealt with them that had familiar spirits, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger. And he set the graven image of Asherah, that he had made, in the house of which Jehovah said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever; neither will I cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land which I gave their fathers, if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the

law that my servant Moses commanded them. But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do that which is evil more than did the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel (2 Kin. 21:1-9).

There are presently multitudes of "seducing spirits" who being dissatisfied with the Lord's arrangement of things, roam the brotherhood seeking to restructure the church and modify the gospel of Christ. These people are rocks in our love feasts, they are clouds without water, they are trees without fruit, they are wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; they are wandering stars, and for them is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 12-13). And it is high time they were arrested in their erratic course. We know who they are; they have been identified numerous times.

Doctrines of Demons

Has there ever been a single case of apostasy where false doctrine of some kind has not been involved? Good brethren sometimes assume that false doctrine was not the reason why some have "fallen away." We all have made this mistake, but every apostate believed something wrong, some kind of error, or he would not have fallen from the truth. We have before us the doctrine of demons. We could here involve ourselves in an in-depth discussion relative to the use of the preposition *of*, whether it is objective or subjective, but in the end it would come out pretty much the same: false teaching. There are no disembodied spirits flying around in the atmosphere teaching any kind of doctrine, false or otherwise. False doctrine comes from men who are flesh and blood and bones, and God's Word's alerts us to the presence of such and authorizes us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered" (Jude 3). It will be observed that in 1 Timothy 4:1 Paul uses the plural (*didaskaliais*) "teachings." Christ has only *doctrine*. He Himself said, "My teaching [singular] is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). The Bible espouses one *doctrine*, but false teachers have their *doctrines*. What is taught by false teachers is correctly referred to as the "doctrine of demons." The devil is the author of all false doctrine, beginning with the lie he told Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3), and anyone who allows himself to believe and teach false doctrine has committed his soul to Satan, claiming him as his father.

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not

in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof (John 8:44).

Rejection of Sound Doctrine

Contrary to what some believe “sound doctrine” exists.

For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

A more literal rendition would be: “For there will be a time when the being healthy teaching they will not bear with” (Nestle). In the present context the time was coming when sound doctrine would not be endured, and the rejection of the same would end in apostasy, and it undeniably did, but the scenario does not end here. Sound doctrine still exists and there are those who will still reject it. But what is meant by *sound* doctrine? If a thing can be *sound*, it can also by implication be *unsound*. *Sound* is the translation of *hugiaino* which means to be healthy. According to W. E. Vine, the word is related to our English *hygiene*. We consequently speak of sound health, sound speech, sound words, etc. “The faith” of which Jude spoke (Jude 3) refers to an established body of truth or doctrine then in existence and recognized as *sound* or *healthy*. It is healthy or sound because it is complete, final, adequate, and perpetual (cf., Col. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). It once existed in parts (1 Cor. 13:9-12), but now it exists, and has existed since Jude 3 was penned, as an established whole. But there are still those who feel inclined to reject this sound doctrine.

If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

This verse must of necessity be unpleasant and embarrassing to those who shown no recognition of sound doctrine, because Paul said, “He is puffed up, knowing nothing.”

Compromise

One of the first people in Bible times who sought to compromise was none other than the Pharaoh. Subsequent to the ninth plague (darkness) sent upon Egypt (Exo. 10:21), “Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve Jehovah; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your

little ones also go with you" (Exo. 10:24). Actually, this is the fourth compromise attempted by Pharaoh. As Rex A. Turner, Sr., points out:

1. Pharaoh's first compromise reads: "Go sacrifice to your God in the land" (Exod. 8:25). Satan proposes today: "Be a good man; by all means live a Christian life; only do so where you are; by all means stay out of church, for there are some real sinners in the church."

2. Pharaoh's second compromise reads: "Go you into the wilderness, only ye shall not go very far" (Exod. 8:28). Satan proposes today for those who feel compelled to become members of the church: "By all means become a member of the church, but do not get involved; for when you get baptized, that baptism will cover you. Do not give up your good time; and by all means, do not get cranky over religion."

3. Pharaoh's third compromise reads: "Go now ye that are men, and serve Jehovah" (Exod. 10:11). Satan proposes to those who take the work of the church seriously: "by all means take the work of the church seriously; work in the church; assume responsibility; but do not expect your sons and daughters to live such a circumcised life; let them have a good time while they are young; do not get excited if they dance, drink, and have a high heel good time; after all, they are innocent and must have time to grow up."

4. Pharaoh's fourth compromise reads: "Go ye, serve Jehovah: only let your flocks and your herds be stayed" (Exod. 10:24). Satan proposes today for those who are determined to live faithful lives and to teach and train their children to do the same: "by all means so live the Christian life and teach your children to do the same, only leave your pocketbook behind; make a regular token contribution every Lord's day; but do not be embarrassed when the preacher emphasizes giving; after all, he probably wants a raise; and after all, you worked and earned that money; and that money belongs to you."¹¹

Moses did not express any concern in any of the proposals made by Pharaoh, but regarding the fourth compromise suggested by Pharaoh Moses said, "There shall not a hoof be left behind" (Exo. 10:26). There are many New Testament Christians today who are following in the footsteps of the Pharaoh. They are continually making concessions and compromising their faith. There may be situations in life where compromise may be of benefit because the word means the "settlement of differences in which each side makes a concession." This kind of concession does not necessarily involve the sacrifice of scruples, but in the religious realm it is quite different; compromise can never, under any circumstances, be practiced if it involves surrendering biblical principles, and it often does. One of the things that has distinguished the New

Testament church from the churches of men is its worship without the use of any mechanical instrument. But now, because of compromise, there are those who would be just as happy with the instrument as without it. It is no longer a matter of faith to those of this suasion. On the other hand, there are those of us who certainly do consider the use of a mechanical instrument in worship a matter of faith, and because we do, we will not make any concessions. We will not in any case, under any circumstance, settle religious differences by surrendering our position on the music question. We take the position that the use of mechanical instruments in worship is sinful. The compromise of biblical principles is not an option for the Christian. To follow such a course can only spell eventual apostasy.

True Conversion Did Not Exist

Apostasy can result even when conversion has been true to God's Word. When Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ, many of them were baptized (converted). A certain man, Simon by name, who had, beforetime in the city, used sorcery on the people, also believed and was baptized. The conversion of the Samaritans has never been questioned, but the conversion of Simon has come under question, but not for the right reasons. If the conversion of the Samaritans was true (genuine), so was Simon's for he *also* believed and was baptized. *Also* in this text means "in like manner." If Simon's conversion was genuine, so was that of the Samaritans, for so the word *kai* (also) implies. Simon's conversion was genuine, but he was later overcome by an unholy desire. Many people are truly converted to Christ, but for one reason or another they sometimes fall into error and become the victims of apostasy. On the other hand, with some people a process which has been called *conversion* has been gone through, but because of insufficient teaching and/or improper response, apostasy soon results. If the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God (Luke 8:11), does not get deeply planted in the heart and allowed to remain, as in the case of the person represented by the *wayside* soil (Mat. 13), there will not be a proper response. Genuine conversion (there is really no other kind) involves the understanding. In Romans 6:17, Paul stated:

But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were

delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness.

Time and patience will show that the original word *strepho* occurs several times in the New Testament and is translated "turn" with only an exception or two. In most of the cases where *strepho* occurs, that which was turned *turned itself* (cf., Acts 7:42; 13:46; Luke 7:9; 7:44). The word *epistrepho*, a strengthened form, also occurs many times, and in most cases that which was turned *turned itself* (cf., Mat. 9:22; 10:13; Mark 5:30). What all this means is that conversion means *turned to God*, but no one turns himself to God without undergoing a change in heart (accomplished by faith), a change in life (repentance), and a change in relation or state (baptism). If these acts are not genuine, conversion is not genuine; and if conversion is not genuine, apostasy will many times be the result.

CONCLUSION

Apostasy should be a matter of great concern to all the children of God because it means eternal disaster if continued in. It never happens in a "moment of time." Its seeds are usually embedded in the heart long before the falling away occurs. It was so in the case of the Galatians; they were in the process of removing themselves from the gospel when Paul wrote the letter to them expressing his surprise at their action. Jesus Christ had been openly set forth crucified before them, but they had allowed themselves to be seduced by false teachers; they had abused their freedom in Christ; they had attempted to justify themselves by the law. In spite of the blessings to which they were privy, they were rejecting the Lord. Apostasy is one of the great dangers facing the church of the Lord today. It is like an iceberg, the greatest portion of which lies buried beneath the surface, but it is there! The seeds of apostasy can lie buried in the human heart, unseen and unknown for an indefinite period of time, but there growing all the time, and finally an eruption occurs and apostasy becomes a reality. The fact that the Galatians were "so soon removing" themselves from the gospel can do nothing less than sadden the human heart. It was so then; it is so now. There are many who no longer walk in the footsteps of Christ; they seem to be totally unaware of the fact that if they live without Him here, they will live without Him there.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), p. 59.

³Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1958), p. 4.

⁴W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, n.d.), p. 29.

⁵Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 507.

⁶Guthrie, Quoted in Rienecker, p. 512.

⁷Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes: Notes on the New Testament*, “2 Corinthians and Galatians” ed. Robert Frew, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 381-382.

⁸Rienecker, p. 515.

⁹James Boyd, “The Basic Message of Galatians and How It Lives for Men Today,” *The Living Messages of the Books of the New Testament*, ed. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1976), p. 151.

¹⁰Rienecker, p. 439.

¹¹Rex A. Turner, Sr., “The Plagues In Egypt—Exposure Of Egyptian Idolatry,” *The Book of Exodus*, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1987), pp. 105-106.

“THEY WILL NOT ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE” 2 TIMOTHY 4:2-3

Paul Vaughn



Paul Vaughn was born in Maysville, Kentucky. He is married to the former Ricki Jett, and attended Maysville Community College, Lexington Technical Institute, and is a 1986 graduate from East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions.

Paul worked in mission fields in Ohio and Kentucky for ten years, helping to establish a congregation in Brown County, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky; he presently is working in a new mission field in Hancock County, Kentucky. Paul is a debater, editor, and publisher. He edited a book on the history of the church in Eastern Kentucky and has written lesson commentaries on the book of Hebrews and Daniel. He writes a monthly article for *Contending For The Faith* on Restoration History. He is a speaker in the TV broadcast, “What Does The Bible Say,” sponsored by the

Southwest Church of Christ in Clinton, Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental characteristics of the faithful Christian is the distinctiveness of the doctrine he teaches. The doctrine of Christ is absolutely necessary; it is indispensable, required, and must never be neglected. The Scriptures proclaim thunderously the importance of sound doctrine. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).¹ Those who have advanced themselves beyond the doctrine of Christ and championed the precepts of men have forfeited fellowship with God and Jesus. They have deserted the only teaching that has the power to save the soul. Paul understood the importance of cleaving to, adhering to, heeding, and sustaining the doctrine which has the power to save the soul from hell. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

A quick glance at the table of contents of this lectureship book will reveal that throughout history sad statements have been declared about the hearts and actions of men. We find one of the more heartbreaking declarations in Paul's second epistle to Timothy. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). This verse is extremely sad, not because men cannot understand the importance of teaching "sound doctrine," or that the doctrine of Christ cannot be ascertained but the expression is heartbreaking because many do not have the courage or the love of God to obey the faultless and flawless doctrine of Christ.

THE NEED FOR SOUND DOCTRINE

Today, there is a lack of doctrinal emphasis in many churches of Christ. Because of this absence of sound doctrine, Christians are being deceived by the cunning of men. In many respects, they act like children who have lost their way in the storms of life. Immaturity will cause Christians to be confused by the torrents of life and lose sight of the mark set forth in the Scriptures. Paul warned the church at Ephesus not to be deceived and carried about by the doctrines of men: "That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14).

A weakened view of Biblical authority has caused many to embrace denominational error and compromise the truth found only in the doctrine of Christ. There is not a demand for a "thus saith the Lord" in the worship and teachings of many congregations. The consequences of moving away from "sound doctrine" has undermined the cause of Christ prompting Christians to change their view of good and evil. God pronounced a woe on the Israelites because they lost sight of their moral direction. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for better" (Isa. 5:20).

Sound doctrine is the seed that will produce faithful Christians and churches standing for truth. In the Parable of the Sower Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). When the Word of God is sown in honest hearts, the fruit produced will be Christians. This is the only doctrine necessary to put one in an acceptable relationship with God.

During the life of Christ there were different sects in the Jewish religion. The two major sects in New Testament times are the Pharisees and Sadducees. Pharisee doctrine produced Pharisees, and Sadducee doctrine produced Sadducees. The doctrine of the Pharisees would never produce a Sadducee, and the doctrine of Sadducees would never produce a Pharisee. In the denominational world the same is true today. Baptist doctrine will produce Baptists. Methodist doctrine will produce Methodists. Mormon doctrine will produce Mormons. The list can be extended to all denominations, each having its own doctrine, making its own plan of salvation, following its own standard in religion with no thought for what is authorized in the Scriptures. Sound doctrine eliminates the divisions in denominationalism and sectarianism.

THE NEED TO STUDY SOUND DOCTRINE

There is always the need to study sound doctrine in every generation. It is through Bible study that Christians learn how to handle correctly the Word of God. Paul told Timothy to be diligent in studying Scriptures. "Study [Give diligence—ASV] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The Scriptures are all-sufficient to prepare mankind to live a life that is pleasing to God. Timothy was taught from the Scriptures in his childhood by his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. This teaching of God's Word to Timothy made him knowledgeable and prudent toward God and salvation. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Studying and reflecting on sound doctrine will help one overcome the temptations of life, enabling him to prevail over sin. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11). When Jesus was tempted by the Devil, it was to the Scriptures He went to defeat that old enemy. The Tempter tried to get Jesus to turn stones into bread, "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. 4:4).

Jesus was victorious over the temptations of the Devil because He knew the Scriptures and He was not embarrassed to quote them to refute error. Because of the social gospel giving an uncertain sound from pulpits, too many Christians are too polite to refute doctrinal error. They

are embarrassed to proclaim sound doctrine, or they do not know enough Scripture to recognize untruths, error, when faced with it. Possibly many of the errors being taught and confronted by the church today could have been eliminated and rejected if more Christians saw the need to study sound doctrine.

FAILURE OF ENDURANCE IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE

During the life time of the apostles, several Christians did not endure sound doctrine. In Galatians, Paul fought Jewish Christians who sought to synthesize Judaism and Christianity. The Galatians were about to follow a perverted gospel by sacrificing sound doctrine for the ideologies, concepts, and precepts of men. Synthesized religion is not acceptable to God, and the result is apostasy. “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

Corinth was one of the most important cities in Greece for worldwide commerce, but it was languishing in idolatrous religion and a degraded culture. The Corinthians needed the gospel of Christ, yet the church at Corinth faced an assortment of problems, struggles, and pressures because they turned from sound doctrine. Jesus prayed that His followers would be united in teaching and purpose as He and the Father are inseparable in doctrine and mission. “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). But, the Christians at Corinth were suffering from envy, strife, and divisions. They abused the Lord’s Supper and put up with sexual immorality. Christians at Corinth suffered greatly because they did not endure sound doctrine.

In Revelation John reveals congregations which did not endure sound doctrine. The church at Pergamos compromised with the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:12-17). The church at Thyatira tolerated a false *prophetess* to deceive many to sin (Rev. 2:18-29).

With the examples of so many who failed to endure sound doctrine in the New Testament so plainly taught and rebuked, one would think that the next generation would be extremely careful to persist and endure sound doctrine. But that was not the case!

FAILURE OF ENDURANCE IN THE POST-APOSTOLIC AGE

During the first three hundred years after the death of the apostles an enormous apostasy came about in the church. There were attacks from within and external to the church.

External Influence

Persecution of the church caused some to fall from the truth. This persecution the early church encountered was anticipated. Jesus warned of it before His death. "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

Jewish opposition of Christianity was extremely strong. This persecution started in the early days of the church during the foundational period of growth and carried over into the Post-Apostolic Age. Stephen was killed for his defense of the gospel before the Council of the Jews (Acts 7:1-60). Saul persecuted the church as much as possible, before he was converted to Christ. "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison" (Acts 8:3). Jewish leaders feared Christianity because the gospel taught the end of the Law of Moses and the beginning of a new system by which one could receive forgiveness of sins.

The policy of the Roman government was to persecute Christians. In A.D. 95 during the reign of Domitian, Christians were killed for their faith in Christ. Some lost property and were banished to foreign lands. John, an apostle of the Lord, suffered for his faith and was exiled to the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). Christians could not participate in the ceremonies in the Roman Empire because many of them honored Caesar as *divine*. There were many of the elders in the church who lost their lives for the faith. Ignatius was thrown to wild beasts about A.D. 115. Polycarp, an elder at Smyrna, was killed during the reign of Antoninous. There were many who suffered and died for Christ, but the external persecutions caused some not to endure and to fall from the truth.

Internal Influences

Perhaps the internal influences caused greater damage to the church than the powers outside of the church. The internal errors in the church

during the second and third centuries took a great toll causing some to not endure sound doctrine. Gnosticism is one of those heresies which started during the lives of Paul and John and continued into the second century. The basic teaching of Gnosticism was a dualism that matter was evil and spirit was good. Because of the influences of Gnostic teaching, some believed that atonement through the death of Jesus was not necessary. They believed that salvation came through knowledge, not the blood of Christ. Yet, the Bible directly, plainly, and clearly teaches that it is through the blood of Jesus that atonement for sin is made possible. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Ebionism is another heresy in the second century that was the cause of some Christians leaving the doctrine of Christ. This schism started in Palestine and had many different variations. Their core doctrines were concerned with the Deity of Jesus. They denied the divinity of Jesus and taught that He was the human son of Joseph and Mary. Those in the Ebionite community rejected Paul as an apostle and his writings as Scripture. Ebionites taught a mixture of Jewish laws and Christianity. They believed in keeping the Sabbath and circumcision. One can see from their convictions that they did not endure sound doctrine; instead they chose to follow the ideologies and opinions of men.

One of the monumental internal influences in the early church to draw Christians from sound teaching was the writing of creeds. The creeds of men became the standard and not the Scriptures. When man refuses to respect the authority of the Bible and writes creeds to follow and honor, the only outcome is apostasy. Many of the creeds came about as the church was trying to establishing a standard to test heresies. But, the Lord had already set the standard by which man can evaluate any teaching. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The **Words** written by the inspiration of God are and always will be the standard for the church to evaluate any doctrine being advanced both then and today.

The slow change in church government is another example of many Christians who did not endure sound doctrine. By the fourth century the Roman emperor, Constantine, regarded himself as the head of the church.

This could only happen because of the lack of desire for sound doctrine in the hearts of many Christians.

Failure to endure sound doctrine in the Post-Apostolic Age caused a myriad of people to lose their souls. There can be volumes written about the great apostasy of the church from the second to the fourth centuries, but these few examples show clearly the preponderance of Christians who did not endure sound doctrine.

FAILURE OF ENDURANCE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

The restoration principle of going to God's Word and restoring the worship authorized by God is not new to God's people. Throughout the Old Testament there are examples of the faithful remnant of God's people restoring the pattern of worship under the Law of Moses. One of those magnificent examples of a man trusting in God was Josiah. After Hilkiah found the "book of the law" that was lost in the temple, Josiah worked rigorously to reinstate the Covenant of God that their fathers had not hearkened unto. God's evaluation of Josiah is forever recorded in the Scriptures as an encouragement to all who will fight the good fight of faith to restore the Word of God over the precepts of men.

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him (2 Kin. 23:25).

Josiah was able to restore the pattern of worship authorized by God because he was not sympathetic to sin. This is something that each generation must learn if they are seeking to please God.

In the late 1700s and the early 1800s, men from different denominations began to return to the old paths established in the New Testament. They were willing to sacrifice all the benefits they enjoyed in denominationalism and to suffer the rejection of men to have truth as their guide and anchor. Shortly after they began to take steps back to the Bible, some did endure sound doctrine. In 1805, three Shaker missionaries came to Kentucky to sow the seeds of error and converted two men from the way of truth to following a lie. Richard McNemar and John Dunlavy did not continue in the "Ancient Order" of going back to the Bible and "*speak* as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. 4:11). Their desertion from truth led others into uncharted paths, causing many to lose their souls. This is the way

of error. There is always someone other than the originator of the damnable teaching, who will be led from truth and pay the consequences.

In 1849, D. S. Burnett introduced the American Christian Missionary Society to do the missionary work for the church. There was no scriptural authority for such a society, and it began to drive a wedge in a magnificent brotherhood and put stumbling blocks of iniquity before many Christians.

In 1859, Lewis Littig Pinkerton introduced mechanical instrumental music into the worship of the church of Christ at Midway, Kentucky. In the decades following the introduction of the American Christian Missionary Society and mechanical instrumental music in the church, a division came about, causing brethren to go to spiritual warfare against each other. Those who took the permissive paths kept traveling down the expressway of error because they could not endure sound doctrine.

There are many other doctrines of men which caused division in the body of Christ during the first two hundred years of the Restoration Movement. Controversy came about because of the cooperation of churches in doing mission work. Premillennialism is another doctrine that raised its ugly head leading Christians from the paths of truth. All of these cancers that have grown to cause spiritual death in many congregations could have been overcome if men only had the desire to seek out sound doctrine and be obedient to it. Sin is always at the door, seeking to destroy the soul of man. The only way to overcome sin is to lay God's Word up in the heart, using it as the guide to lead one to Heaven. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11).

FAILURE OF ENDURANCE TODAY

Christians in this generation are perhaps more blessed than any generation before. In America, Christians enjoy the freedom to worship God and study their Bibles. There is easy access to the preaching of the gospel of Christ in every town and city. Christians have freedom to debate issues that confront the Lord's church without concern for physical safety. Yet attitudes that lead to digression are flowing along in strong currents of compromise with many Christians not enduring sound doctrine.

The Perversion of Worship

The Lord has set the standard for the worship that is acceptable in the church of Christ. "God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Worship must be devoid of hypocrisy, chicanery, and deceit. One must worship God as He has revealed in the New Testament. If man had the perfect diamond or perfect pearl, he would be foolish to tamper with it in any way. God has given the perfect pattern for worship, yet men treat it as something that needs to be tampered with at their discretion.

Worship is nothing more than an emotional roller coaster ride to many religious groups, while others teach that all of life is worship. Both are extremes transported into the hearts of men by those who have not endured sound doctrine on worship.

The Perversion of Baptism

The Scriptures teach that one is saved only by the blood of Christ. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). The only way to come in contact with the saving power of His blood is immersion in water for the remission of sin (baptism). Paul said, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). Paul understood that baptism saves, because he was taught in Damascus about the saving power of baptism. Ananias said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Yet, today one hears about the pious unimmersed in different denominations. One cannot read about such a creature in the New Testament or even read about different denominations. Someone has not endured sound doctrine.

Perversion of God's Plan for Marriage

Marriage is very important to God! God views marriage as honorable and has a very serious attitude about it. "Marriage *is* honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). It has always been and will always be one man for one woman for life. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mat.19:6). Jesus gave

only one exception to this law of God that began in the garden of Eden at the beginning to time, that being the innocent party in the case of fornication may remarry. Jesus said:

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Mat. 19:9).

The matter has been settled in the mind of God, but there are many who try to change God's marriage plan. They have not endured sound doctrine!

Perversion of Morals

Truly one of the most heartbreaking appraisals about American people is the corruption of morals in this country. Homosexuality is glorified in society, adultery is not seen as sin, school children are killing each other, suicide takes more young people's lives each year than automobile accidents, premarital sex is more common than the flu among young people, alcoholism is reaching record epidemic proportions, evil is looked upon as good and good is called evil. This is not the worst, some of these pernicious things are beginning to show their face in the church. One example is social drinking; another is improper dress. It is shameful, disgraceful, immodest, and offensive the way some Christians dress to come to worship! Paul told to Christians at Rome to live according to the gospel standard. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service*" (Rom. 12:1).

It is evident by the current void of sound preaching from many pulpits that the hearts of men in many congregations have not endured sound doctrine. From the lack of the love for truth many other strange doctrines will find a home in the thoughts of weak Christians, leading multitudes into untruths.

CONCLUSION

Sound doctrine will keep a church spiritually healthy. It is needed to instruct Christians in the way of God, preparing them to be able to live with God in Heaven. Failure to adhere to the faultless teaching of the Scriptures means that men have chosen to seek preaching according to their lascivious, lewd, temporal, and worldly desires.

Jesus demands obedience to His doctrine and love for the Lord necessitates compliance on man’s behalf. Yet, sadly, most will not endure sound doctrine.

ENDNOTE

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“DEMAS HATH FORSAKEN ME”

2 TIMOTHY 4:10

Joe E. Galloway



Joe E. Galloway was born near Parkersburg, West Virginia. He is married to the former Barbara Anderson and they have four children and eleven grandchildren.

Joe graduated from Freed-Hardeman College in 1957. He preached his first sermon in Vienna, West Virginia in 1953. He has done local work with congregations in Tennessee, Ohio, West Virginia, and Virginia, and has worked in Tampere, Finland. He helped start a congregation in Greeneville, Tennessee, now known as the Asheville Highway Church of Christ and is presently working with this congregation. This work is sponsored by the Cherokee Church of Christ, Johnson City, Tennessee. Since

1986, Joe has been a speaker on the half-hour weekly **TV Sunday School** class over WJHL, Johnson City, Tennessee. He maintains a large Bible Correspondence Course program started in 1995 and mailed 2,300 lessons in 1999. He has written three series on *A Study of End Things*; *Studies in the New Testament Book of Romans*; *Topical Bible Studies*; and is presently writing *A Studies in the New Testament Book of Hebrews*. Joe conducts several gospel meetings each year, speaks on a number of lectureships, and writes for numerous brotherhood publications.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that Jesus suffered rejection and persecution guarantees that His followers will also suffer rejection and persecution. Jesus told His disciples: “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).¹ Jesus was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). Even His “familiar friend” turned against Him (Psa. 41:9; John 13:18).

So, we should also expect to suffer for Christ:

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution
(2 Tim. 3:12).

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us,
leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm
yourselves likewise with the same mind (1 Pet. 4:1).

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you (1 Pet. 4:12).

Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:16).

Jesus said that such suffering would often come, even from relatives and close friends:

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law (Luke 12:51-53).

OUR TEXT

Understanding the inevitability of Christians having to suffer, just as their Lord suffered, makes it much easier to understand what happened to Paul. Although having already related that the time of his execution was near (2 Tim. 4:6), and having confidently affirmed his readiness to die (2 Tim. 4:7-8), Paul then writes this heartrending statement concerning a former *fellowlabourer* (Phm. 24 and Col. 4:14): "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia" (2 Tim. 4:10).

In order to understand better the sadness and gravity of this text, let us consider some background material regarding (1) Paul's life, (2) his past suffering, and (3) the extended context of this verse in 2 Timothy.

SOME BACKGROUND MATERIAL

An Outline of Paul's Life

1. We are first introduced to Paul as Saul, a Pharisee and a persecutor (Acts 7 and 8).
2. The circumstances of His conversion are related in Acts 9.
3. Although little additional information is available for this time period, he was in Arabia and Damascus three years before his first visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17-18). Here Barnabas introduced him to the apostles, allaying the fears of the Jerusalem church regarding this known former persecutor (Acts 9:26-28).

4. When the Jerusalem brethren learned of a plot on his life, they sent Paul to his original home area of Tarsus (Acts 9:11, 30).
5. Barnabas, having been sent to work in Antioch, brought Saul from Tarsus to assist him in teaching here. They worked together at Antioch for a whole year (Acts 11:22-26).
6. Next, the Antioch church sent Paul on three missionary journeys (Acts 13:1-21:26). During his second and third journeys, he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans.
7. Due to false charges from the Jews, he was imprisoned for two years—first at Jerusalem, then at Caesarea (Acts 21:27-26:32).
8. When it became evident that his case would not receive unprejudiced treatment, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen by appealing his case to Caesar. His journey to Rome as a prisoner is given in Acts 27:1-28:15.
9. A prisoner in Rome for two whole years (Acts 28:16-31), during this time he also wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.
10. It is evident that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment. Assuming that he did as planned, he visited Colossae (Phm. 22; cf., Col. 4:17) and Philippi (Phi. 2:24) during this time. Possibly he visited Ephesus before visiting these churches in Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). From Macedonia he wrote 1 Timothy and then returned to Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:14). It is also evident that he visited Crete, leaving Titus there during this time (Tit. 1:5). Sometime afterward he planned to spend the winter at Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12). It is probable that during these travels he had visited Carpus at Troas (2 Tim. 4:13) and left ailing Trophimus at Miletum (2 Tim. 4:20). In addition to 1 Timothy, Paul also wrote Titus during this four to five-year period of freedom. (Often 1 Timothy—Titus are called “pastoral epistles,” but they are **not** such: neither Timothy nor Titus were elders! They were simply *evangelists*, doing special work assigned by an apostle.) Some have contended that he also visited Spain (and possibly the British Isles) at this time, but this author does not believe there is sufficient evidence for such a conjecture.

11. The Bible gives us no information of where Paul was when again arrested. Some suggest Ephesus, some Nicopolis, and others Rome. Second Timothy is written after he had been arrested, had already had his preliminary hearing, and was awaiting execution (2 Tim. 4:16, 6). If tradition is correct, he was executed by beheading near Rome at the third milestone on the Ostian Way during the last year of Nero's reign (probably in the spring of A.D. 68).

Paul's Suffering

Apart from Christ, and possibly Job, probably no biblical person suffered more than Paul.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ...That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (Phi. 3:7-8, 10).

It was the sorrow of the rejection of his apostleship by his own Judaizing brethren that elicited the most complete list we have of Paul's sufferings:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) *I am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

The Bible mentions Paul shedding tears several times: He reminded the Ephesian elders that he had served there "with many tears" and told them "that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:19, 31). Concerning the forceful letter he had earlier written them, Paul told the church at Corinth: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4). He was *weeping* as he wrote concerning the "enemies of the

cross of Christ: Whose end *is* destruction” (Phi. 3:18-19). It is noteworthy that he did not weep regarding persecution, hardship, or even imprisonment. Instead, these tears were shed over things that dishonored God, endangered souls, and badly influenced the gospel.

Rather than a reason for sorrow, Paul considered his many sufferings as a reason for rejoicing. He said, “If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities” (2 Cor. 11:30). Later in this same epistle he added:

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9b-10).

He considered such sufferings to simply be a part of gaining heaven:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

The Extended Context of 2 Timothy 4:10

Realizing that the time of his execution was imminent, Paul writes Timothy this second letter to encourage his continued faithfulness and to ask him to come to him soon. He encourages him to “stir up” the spiritual gift he had formerly imparted to him and then says:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God (2 Tim. 1:6-8).

He asked Timothy to try his best to come before winter, bringing Paul’s cloak, books, and “especially the parchments” (2 Tim. 4:21, 13). The urging to “come before winter” may have been due to Paul’s need for the cloak for warmth—or, possibly it could suggest Paul’s fear that Timothy needed to come before winter to arrive before the execution took place.

A brief warning is given Timothy to beware of Alexander the copersmith who had done Paul “much evil” and “greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:14-15), prompting some to suggest that this man may have served as a witness against Paul before Nero’s court. Whatever the *evil* he caused, there must have been some great danger that Timothy would encounter him either at Ephesus or when he reached Rome.

Paul’s second imprisonment at Rome was much more restrictive than the first. Whereas during his first imprisonment he had the liberty to live in his own rented house, receiving visitors freely (Acts 28:30), now he is in bonds (2 Tim. 2:9). The political climate has changed drastically, making it now dangerous to be associated with this great man of God (see Reese,² Smith,³ and Conybeare and Howson⁴ for further information on this change).

Paul mentions a “first answer” when “no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me” (2 Tim. 4:16). This can hardly refer to his first imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31), for he was not forsaken then (Phi. 4:21). Evidently this “first answer” was a preliminary hearing.

Most agree that Paul is referring to the two stages of the Roman judicial system. The first stage is called the *prima actio* (the first action) which is like a modern grand jury and constitutes a preliminary investigation. If the judge was not satisfied, he would declare an adjournment (*ampliatio*) and call for a second hearing. The second stage is called the *secunda actio* (the second action). This is the equivalent of the modern trial in which a verdict is handed down. Paul had already been through the *prima actio* and was now awaiting the second stage, the actual trial itself, which could possibly bring Paul face to face with the Emperor himself.⁵

“DEMAS HATH FORSAKEN ME”

“Forsaken” (*enkatalipo*) is much stronger than merely the idea of having simply left Paul. Vincent comments: “The compound preposition *en* indicates a condition or circumstances *in* which one has been left, as the common phrase *left in the lurch*.”⁶ Thayer, citing this text, gives the definition: “1. *to abandon, desert... i.e. to leave in straits, leave helpless, (colloq. leave in the lurch).*”⁷ It is the word Jesus used in Matthew 27:46, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”—and the word used in Hebrews 10:25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” The usage of this word implies that he did not honorably leave Paul. MacKnight well says, “By calling the departure of Demas to Thessalonica a *forsaking him*, the apostle intimates that he departed without his permission.”⁸ Besides Demas having “departed into Thessalonica,” Crescens and Titus are said to have departed into Galatia and Dalmatia, respectively. But they are not accused of having *forsaken* Paul, as had Demas. So it is generally concluded that both Crescens (never mentioned elsewhere in the Bible) and Titus (always mentioned as a faithful evan-

gelist) had departed from Paul in their continued works of preaching the gospel of Christ.

Does this necessarily mean that Demas completely left the faith? I am not certain that it does, although I certainly do not sanction his having abandoned Paul in this hour of great need. Clarke comments: "It is not intimated that he had denied the faith, but simply that he *had left the apostle and gone into Thessalonica*; for which this reason is given, that he loved the present world."⁹

WHY DEMAS FORSOOK PAUL

The text simply states that Demas forsook Paul "having loved this present world," but what does "having loved this present world" mean? At least four possible meanings have been suggested.

1. Clarke suggests it means: "Having preferred Judaism to Christianity; or having loved the Jews, and having sought their welfare in preference to that of the Gentiles."¹⁰ He bases this on the claim that the same phrase "this present world" in *Hebrew* generally signifies the Jews or Judaism. Although it is possible that Demas returned to Judaism, seeing that it was not presently being persecuted as was the Lord's church, we do not believe this to be a necessary conclusion here. There is no Bible evidence to even suggest that he was a Jew. His name is thought to be the shortened form of Demetrius, a Greek name.

2. Some suggest that his loving this present world means he loved material gain, equating "this present world" (*ton nun aiona*) with the rich "in this world" (*ton aioni*) of 1 Timothy 6:17.¹¹

3. Some have used this as a text against the *worldliness* of various immoral practices, suggesting that Demas went into gross immorality. Against this view Barnes says, "I see no evidence that Demas was influenced by what are commonly called *worldly* feelings, or that he was led to this course by the desire of wealth, or fame, or pleasure."¹²

4. The context of the statement suggests that Demas forsook Paul because he loved living now and did not want to risk losing his life by remaining in Rome with Paul. He did not have the attitude of the apostle Paul in believing that "to die *is* gain" (Phi. 1:21). He certainly was not like those that overcame Satan "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" and who "loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11)! Barnes states this well in his comments on *having loved this present world*:

This does not mean, necessarily, that he was an avaricious man, or that, in itself, he loved the honours or wealth of this world; but it means that he desired to live. He was not willing to stay with Paul, and subject himself to the probabilities of martyrdom; and, in order to secure his life, he departed to a place of safety.¹³

Although "having loved this present world" refers to his desire to continue to live, he was jeopardizing his soul! "The fearful" are categorized right along with murderers, idolaters, and whoremongers—who "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Concerning these "fearful" (*deilos*), Thayer says, "in Rev. xxi.8 of Christians who through cowardice give way under persecutions and apostatize."¹⁴ This desire to live may also be connected with "the cares and riches and pleasures of this life" that Jesus said would "choke" some believers (Luke 8:14). It certainly runs counter to the Christian's responsibility to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2).

PAUL'S ATTITUDE IN ALL OF THIS

First, Paul did not want vengeance on those who had not stood with him, but had forsaken him. He said, "*I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge" (2 Tim. 4:16). This reflects the same attitude expressed by our Lord on the cross (Luke 23:34) and by Stephen at his execution (Acts 7:59-60). It does not state that they will not be condemned for such, but only expresses Paul's desire that it not be their lot. It contrasts with Paul's stronger statement regarding Alexander the coppersmith who had done Paul much evil: "the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Tim. 4:14). It does reflect the attitude we must have when men disappoint, or even harm, us.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head (Rom. 12:19-20).

Second, Paul had confidence in the Lord's provision for his real need. Even though all had forsaken him at his first hearing, he said:

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the

Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen (2 Tim. 4:17-18).

Paul's primary concern was that the gospel be taught and that the Lord's cause be furthered—shown by the statements, “that by me the preaching might be fully known” and “*that* all the Gentiles might hear.” During his first imprisonment at Rome he had written, “that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out...unto the furtherance of the gospel,” relating that this had both resulted in some being taught “in all the palace” and had also emboldened others to preach without fear (Phi. 1:12-14). Possibly the Gentiles who “might hear” this time were those who would be present during his trial and hear what he had to say. Without doubt, although it was a trial before Caesar, Paul would do as he had done in his former trials—use the trial as much as possible to further teach the gospel of Jesus Christ!

What is the meaning of “the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work” (2 Tim. 4:18)? We know that at his first hearing Paul was “delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim. 4:17). This could refer to literal lions since Nero was known to have pitted prisoners against such lions in the amphitheater. Some think “the lion” has reference to Nero himself. It may simply be a commonly-used expression used to show that God in His providence had saved Paul from execution at that time—based on God's deliverance of Daniel from death by those lions (Dan. 6). It is evident, though, that the deliverance of verse 18 is not to again be understood as a deliverance from death, for Paul has already stated that the time of his death was at hand (2 Tim. 4:6).

Evidently the deliverance of verse 18 that Paul confidently expects is the deliverance that comes **through** death **from** the evils, sufferings, and problems that are connected to our living in this physical body! Earlier in this letter he had written of:

the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:10-12).

This **deliverance** (although he would be executed) is the same as what Jesus had promised: "*some* of you shall they cause to be put to death... But there shall not an hair of your head perish" (Luke 21:16-18). Others can do violence to our physical bodies, but cannot harm our souls! "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mat. 10:28).

With unwavering confidence, Paul expected this deliverance to bring him "unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). This would be the abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom" mentioned in 2 Peter 1:11 and would be the "second dominion" of the kingdom implied by Micah 4:8—the "first dominion" being that of the kingdom that began in Jerusalem on Pentecost and that exists now. Having described his impending deliverance into the heavenly kingdom, Paul burst forth in praise to the Lord: "to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen" (2 Tim. 4:18).

THOSE WHO CONTINUED TO ENCOURAGE PAUL

Earlier in his life Paul had said he was "persecuted, but not forsaken" (2 Cor. 4:9). So it was now! Not only was the Lord with him, but Luke was with him—and he looked forward with great anticipation to Timothy and Mark coming to him (2 Tim. 4:11). In addition, the greetings Paul sent from "all the brethren" (of whom four specific names are given) indicate that Paul at least had some contact with local brethren (2 Tim. 4:21).

Luke, "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14), first became a traveling companion and a helper to Paul during Paul's second missionary journey, joining him at Troas (Acts 16:10—where Luke, the writer of Acts, first uses the pronoun *we*). Although remaining in Philippi when Paul continued onward (Acts 16:40), he rejoins Paul when he comes back through this area on his third journey (Acts 20:3-5), and he is still with Paul a few years later when he sails as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 27:1). Evidently he was also with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:14; Phm. 24). In all his relationship with Paul there is never a single mark against him!

Paul had "no man likeminded" to Timothy, his son in the gospel (Phi. 2:19-22). He probably was converted by Paul during his first missionary journey either at Lystra or Derbe (Acts 14:6) since it was there that he

joined Paul as a traveling companion and helper when Paul came back through on his second journey. By this time he was already “well reported of by the brethren” (Acts 16:1-3). He was the recipient of the two letters from Paul that bear his name. Mention is made of Timothy being left to preach in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), a congregation with which he continued to have at least some contact (2 Tim. 1:18) and to which Paul had now sent Tychicus (2 Tim. 4:12). Timothy also spent some time in prison (probably with Paul), although we do not know the details of time, place, and length of stay (Heb. 13:23). Perhaps no warmer greeting was given by Paul than when he wrote to Timothy as: “*my own son in the faith*” (1 Tim. 1:2) and “*my dearly beloved son*” (2 Tim. 1:2). This closeness helps explain Paul’s anxious anticipation that Timothy arrive in time to be with him before his death, although we have no way of knowing if this wish was fulfilled.

We are given a brief glance into the magnanimous heart of Paul by his request to Timothy to: “Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). We well remember the sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas when Paul refused Barnabas’ wish to take Mark with them on the second journey—the one “who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work” (Acts 15:37-39). Evidently Mark has now proved himself to Paul’s satisfaction, and Paul is not one to hold a grudge! Think of the good will this simple request would now show to Mark, to all the church that knew of this earlier problem, and how it continues to effect us for good today!

CONCLUSION

Although one of the “sad statements of the Bible,” the overall result of this sad time in the beloved apostle was good! In spite of all the persecution he endured, Paul did not fail the Lord—and the Lord would not forsake Paul! The Lord’s promise to his followers is: “Lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world” (Mat. 28:20). Paul was able to say without fear of contradiction:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

If we also "love his appearing" this Scripture shows that we can have this same confident hope possessed by Paul. But if, instead, we "love this present world" as did Demas, we jeopardize our reward.

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Gareth L. Reese, *New Testament History, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1983), p. 952.

³William Smith, *New Testament History* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1894), pp. 626-628.

⁴Quoted in: *Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1963), p. 297.

⁵John Mark Hicks, "A Personal Word To Timothy," *Studies in Timothy and Titus* (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1986), p. 233.

⁶Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 4:324.

⁷Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Company, 1889), p. 166.

⁸James MacKnight, *MacKnight on the Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, n.d.), pp. 481-482.

⁹Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (New York, NY; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1832), 6:638.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Hicks, p. 230.

¹²Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1955), p. 249.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 248-249.

¹⁴Thayer, p. 127.

DEAD THINKING THEY WERE ALIVE REVELATION 3:1

Bobby Liddell



Bobby Liddell, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, and received his education at Walker College, University of Alabama, Memphis School of Preaching, and Southern Christian University. He has preached locally in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee; he has spoken in lectures and meetings, and on radio and television in the states, as well as in missionary trips overseas. He is past Editor of *Defender* and *The Beacon*, past Assistant Editor of *The Christian Sentinel*, and is a staff writer for *The Reasoner*. From 1989 to 1994 he directed the Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, Florida, and edited the Annual Bellview Lectureship Books.

Bobby currently preaches for the Merton Street Church of Christ, Memphis, Tennessee, and serves as Dean of Admissions and Instructor with the Memphis School of Preaching. He is married to Joan (Loe) of Adamsville, Alabama, and they have three children: Anthony Allen, Nathan Gant, and Keri Jayne; and one grandchild, Ethan Brett.

Once again, it is with real rejoicing that I participate in the Bellview Lectures. From my first acquaintance with the outstanding brethren and godly eldership of the Bellview congregation to this very moment, my life has been blessed tremendously as a result. Only eternity will tell how many souls have been brought to a knowledge of the Truth, how many individuals and churches have been blessed, and how many false brethren and false teachers have been thwarted in their nefarious efforts to lead away precious souls—by the efforts, good works, and godly example of this congregation. Certainly, this annual lectureship, just one of Bellview’s many good works, has produced much good locally and around the world, and will continue to contribute to the common good for years to come through the influence of the printed page and recorded media. For this, the Bellview church deserves the gratitude of every Christian and frequent and fervent prayers on their behalf.

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to what so many, in their false hope, believe, and what many others would like to believe, not all is happiness just because God is love (1 John 4:8). Sadness comes because sin has entered the world (Gen. 3:10-24). Any time men depart from the right way, there is sadness because of the guilt and consequences of sin (Psa. 32:10), and the tragedy of tormented souls (Psa. 51). There is also grief brought upon the Godhead (Eph. 4:30; cf., Luke 15:10). Men can be happy, truly content and glad, only when in Christ (Phi. 4:4; Acts 8:39; 16:34; Eph. 1:3-12), in humble service, living in harmony with His will; thus, in cheerful hope of the resurrection and eternal life.

We shall consider the sad statement which exposed the true condition of the majority of those in the church at Sardis (Rev. 3:1), one of the seven churches of Asia to which the Revelation was written (Rev. 1:4). Sadly, the Sardis church had a name that it was living, but it was *dead*. It was flying under a false flag, appearing to be what it was not, believing it was indeed what it was not, trusting in vain all was well, when it was, in reality, as a lifeless corpse.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God (Rev. 3:1-2).¹

HISTORY OF SARDIS

Unlike some of the churches of the first century (such as Jerusalem, Samaria, Philippi, Corinth, et al.), there is no record of the establishment, or beginning, of the church at Sardis. However, we do know much about the city where the church was. Sardis was an old city, located about thirty miles southeast of Thyatira, was capital of the once wealthy kingdom of Lydia, and had been home of the tremendously rich king Croesus.² Herodotus the historian gave the Lydians credit for inventing the use of coins, introducing retail trade, and for inventing the games later played by the Greeks.³ Cybele, considered to be the goddess who blessed them with the riches of silver and gold from the Tmolus mountains, was their principal idol. A great temple to honor the idol Artemis also has been discovered by archaeologists unearthing ancient Sardis.

Sardis was built on a hill top about fifteen hundred feet above sea level, overlooking the Hermus valley.⁴ Because of its location, it was considered to be safe from enemies for the Sardinians thought the terrain would successfully thwart breaching of the city walls. Sadly, their overconfidence and failure to maintain a vigilant watch led to their demise.

Cyrus the Persian came against Sardis in 546 B.C. and was having difficulty taking the city. One of his soldiers observed a defender accidentally drop his helmet over the city wall. As he watched, he noted the hidden pathway taken by the Sardinian to retrieve his helmet. That night, the soldier led a group of Persian attackers up the same path and into the city. The city fell. The people of Sardis thought the city was invulnerable and had allowed themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security. They were not watchful. Surprisingly to them, the enemy entered in the middle of the night, without being detected, and the rich city was taken by the army of Cyrus. Later, Alexander the Great would conquer the city (334 B.C.). Again, in 218 B.C., Sardis would fall to Antiochus III of the Seleucids, whose attackers crept into the city, once more catching the defenders off guard.

The history of the city paralleled the course taken by the church. At the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, Sardis was a dying city, whose greatness was only a memory. She had once lived, gloriously, independently, and proudly. She once had a name indicating her vitality, but now she was spoiled, defeated, and near death. Like the city, the church had a glorious name which described only what it used to be.

JESUS SAID, "I KNOW THY WORKS"

Christ spoke to the churches through the words He gave John to write (cf., Rev. 1:10-20). He stated to each of the seven churches that He knew their works (Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). Therefore, He was well aware, perfectly knowledgeable of their works (deeds or actions). Whether good or bad, He knew. Commendable or not, He knew. Even if they were to try to deceive Him, they could not. His cognizance was complete, His judgment was factual and fair, and His assessment correct and true (cf., Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2). Thus, His commendation or condemnation was right, just, and deserved.

The wise man penned: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil" (Ecc. 12:14). Just so, we who live in New Testament times are told: "For we

must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10; cf., Rom. 14:12; John 5:28-29). We shall all stand before the “righteous judge” (2 Tim. 4:8; cf., Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5; Rev. 16:7), who, as deity, has the power to know the hearts (minds; thus, thoughts), words, and works of all men (cf., John 4:29; Acts 1:24; Mat. 9:4; Luke 6:8; 9:47; 11:17). It must follow, and Revelation 1-3 is proof, that He has the power to know every aspect of the lives of church members individually and of congregations as well. That God knows our works may be enough to make some sad (John 3:18-21).

Does the Son of God know all about the church where we are—and as we really are, not just what we wish or pretend to be? Surely, He knows what we are now—not only what we used to be. What would Jesus say if He were to write a letter to the congregation where we work and worship? Would He write about a true church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), organized according to God’s plan (Phi. 1:1), serving under godly elders united in their oversight (Acts 20:28), with preaching true to the Book (2 Tim. 4:2), and a united, zealous, loving, giving, knowledgeable, evangelistic membership? Would He commend our labors, or would He have to say: “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”?

We know, if He were to address us (as He did the churches of Asia), He would write the truth. Would the unvarnished truth about the congregation’s spiritual condition bring us joy unspeakable or unbearable frightful sorrow? Would it portend a happy future at home with our loving Father or a horrible eternity in hell? Would Jesus pronounce us *alive*, or would He honestly have to say, “Thou...art dead”?

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS HAD A NAME THAT IT LIVED, BUT IT WAS DEAD

The church at Sardis had a name that it lived; that is, it was called *alive*. Names generally are descriptive; for example, Joseph was told concerning the son of Mary: “thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat. 1:21). Fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 7:14), “and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mat. 1:22-23). John was called the Baptist because he baptized people (Mat. 3:1, 6, 13). Jesus called: “James the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James...Boanerges, which is, The

sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Jesus asked the unclean spirit: “What *is* thy name? And he answered, saying, My name *is* Legion: for we are many” (Mark 5:9).

Sometimes, names are not entirely accurate and may even be misleading or paradoxical. A young girl named her kitten, “Sister,” thinking it was a female. Much later, finding out it was a male, she realized Sister did not accurately portray its gender. In an effort to salvage the name to which the cat now answered, she renamed him “Mister Sister,” a name he honored unwittingly until his departure from the living. Some names obviously are given in irony. “Tiny” may be six feet six inches tall and weigh four hundred pounds, and “Lightning” may be the slowest one around. However, the name (that they lived) which men had given the church at Sardis had to do with their reputation, even though the reputation had long outlived its appropriateness.

Lamentably, sometimes declarations of one’s having life are wrong. Two mothers were notified their daughters had been in an accident. One mother was told her daughter was dead, while the other was notified hers was alive. While the first mourned and made funeral arrangements for the dead girl, the second kept a vigil by the injured child’s bedside. Later, the discovery was made that the identities of the girls mistakenly had been switched. The mother who thought her daughter was alive found out, in reality, her beloved child was dead. We can only imagine the dreadful sorrow that gripped her to the core of her being. The poor mother thought her daughter was alive, and had been assured she was, but she was dead. What sorrow!

To be known by, or called by a name indicating life would seem to be good, especially when *alive* indicated spiritual well being (cf., 1 Tim. 5:6). However, this appellation was, in their case, fallacious and faulty (cf., Mat. 23:28). It obviously had more to do with past reputation than present reality. Their resting on their laurels and looking to the past brought to them death in the present and robbed from them hope for the future. Sardis’ reputation no longer accurately described the church for they were now a church of Christ in name only. The truth was they were dead. While men looked upon the church as alive, the Great Physician made the accurate and legal pronouncement of her death. A lesson we should learn from this is that God’s view of a congregation and man’s view may vary widely.

MEN DO NOT DETERMINE SPIRITUAL LIFE; GOD DOES

Multitudes have gazed in awe at the splendor of St. Peter's in Rome, built by the apostate Roman Catholic Church, and have marveled, no doubt thinking: "What a great church," as they considered the beauty of the building and the wealth required to build it.⁵ Many have looked upon modern day denominational mega-churches, such as Willow Creek, with its membership of around seventeen thousand and have admirably commented: "What a great church," because they were impressed with the many people, programs, parties, and performances.⁶ Men see the outward things, material and physical things, judge by misguided emotions, and measure according to a worldly yardstick. God's measurement is without mistake or prejudice (Dan. 5:27).

What makes a church alive? A church is alive when it gladly assembles to offer acceptable (authorized) worship to God (Heb. 10:25; Mat. 4:10; Eph. 3:21), in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), from hearts filled with praise (Psa. 86:12; cf., Heb. 2:12). A church lives when it renders caring benevolence to those in need from hearts filled with mercy (Jam. 1:27; Mat. 25:34-36). A church is alive when it engages in fervent evangelism of those who are lost from hearts filled with compassion (Mat. 28:18-20; 1 The. 1:3, 9). A church lives when it offers much needed encouragement and edification, one to another, from hearts permeated with brotherly love (1 Pet. 1:22; Heb. 13:1; Col. 2:6-7). A church is not necessarily a church of Christ (Rom. 16:16; Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:47), nor is a church of Christ a church which is alive and which God approves just because men think so. Spiritual life is not determined by the attendance of a large number of people, an impressive contribution, and/or a beautiful building. To understand what makes a church alive, consider what makes a Christian alive spiritually; the spiritual lives of church members determine the life of the church (1 Cor. 12:20). Christians live by these things:

1. By "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. 4:4).
2. By loving God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind; and their neighbour as themselves (Luke 10:27-28).
3. By hearing the Word of Christ and believing in God (John 5:24).

4. By partaking of Christ's teaching (John 6:51, 57, 68), and keeping His sayings (John 8:52).
5. By believing in Jesus (John 11:26; 3:15-16; 20:31).
6. By faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).
7. By coming to Christ (John 5:40).
8. By entering into the new life (John 3:3, 5; Rom. 6:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:17).
9. By being dead unto sins and living unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24).
10. By living for Christ (Phi. 1:21).
11. By living in Christ (Eph. 1:3, 7; Gal. 3:26-27; cf., Acts 17:28).
12. By living with Christ (1 The. 5:10).
13. By living through Christ (1 John 4:9).
14. By Christ's living within them (Gal. 2:20).
15. By walking in the light of life (John 8:12).
16. By being spiritually minded (Rom. 8:6).
17. By sowing to the Spirit (Gal. 6:8).
18. By walking the narrow way (Mat. 7:14).
19. By fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12).
20. By repenting and returning to the Father in order to regain life (Luke 15:24, 32).
21. By living in order to receive the crown of life (Jam. 1:12; Mat. 25:46).

JESUS CHRIST MAKES SPIRITUAL LIFE POSSIBLE

Life, for Christians and churches, is possible because Jesus is life, offers life through His death, and promises life, now and eternally, to those who follow Him (John 11:25; Col. 3:4; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13; John 10:10; Rom. 6:23; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:2; John 14:9). Though they were *dead*, Jesus could bring the church at Sardis back to life if they would hear and heed His words. Let us pay close attention to this divine admonition: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:6), lest the sad statement of the Sardinian's situation be applied to us.

The church at Sardis had lived, and still had a name that it lived, but, sadly, it was dead (literally, a corpse). Even sadder, it could have been alive! It should have and would have been alive if it had continued faithfully following the way of life (John 14:6). Its light, which no doubt

had shined brightly in the beginning, was flickering and almost gone out (Mat. 5:13-16). Why?

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS WAS DEAD BECAUSE THEIR WORKS WERE NOT PERFECT BEFORE GOD

A church lives when it is working, fulfilling the mission which Christ, the head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:4), has given it (Mat. 5:16; Mark 13:33-36; 1 Cor. 15:58; 1 The. 1:3). Sardis was not fulfilling its responsibilities to **do** what God said to **do** (cf., Luke 6:46; Rev. 22:14; Mat. 7:21-29; Jam. 1:24). Its works were not perfect, which means they were not complete or finished. Maybe they had made a good start, but had gotten sidetracked, had given out, or given up. Perhaps the way became too strait and the cost too great. Or, it could have been that they planned to do the work, but failed to work the plan. Did they just procrastinate, putting off their work? Did they convince themselves they did not have enough time? Or, were they just sure “someone else” would do the work which God required of them? Again, we are not given the details, but we know what happens when churches fail to do their work.

Christ instructed Sardis to be watchful (stay awake and be on guard). Like the city of old, if they did not maintain a constant, vigilant guard, they were lost (Mat. 24:42-25:13). They must stay awake and alert, on guard against the enemy. Satan is our enemy, but we can be aware and armored against his wiles (1 Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:11). The world is against us, yet we can have victory over the world through Christ by faith (1 John 5:4). Death would rob us, but through Christ we can have victory over death and the grave (1 Cor. 15:57).

He further admonishes them to strengthen the things that remain. They had been going in the wrong direction. It was time for them to turn right, and go forward, settled, stablished, steadfast, and strong. We know weakness often precedes death and may be a herald of it. Their weakness probably, as it often does, came upon them gradually. Inactivity makes a church weak because it causes its spiritual muscles to atrophy.

If elders allow the church to stand still, stagnate, and stall, resting from its labors, they are leading it to a sure death! We dare not “play church.” If a preacher preaches sermons which do not, in addition to exhorting, reprove and rebuke, sounding the alarm against slothful, sleepy indifference, he is helping the brethren to die! If brethren think the purpose of the church is to be a social club and are more concerned about

with whom they are seen and how they look than they are with being **who** they are to be and **doing** what they are to be doing, they are killing the church. If members consider the purpose of preaching to be to tickle their ears (2 Tim. 4:1-4), or, as one sister explained to me, “I like brother _____’s preaching better than yours because he uses a lot of philosophy,” they are driving another nail in the coffin. If by laziness or indifference, we fail to sow the seed, the Word of God (Luke 8:11), we should not be surprised when there is no crop to harvest, and the church dies (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Cor. 3:6).

Jesus said there were some things which remained, but even they were ready to die. It was time to sound the alarm. Emergency measures were needed in order to save what was left. Some were lost, but some still remained. That which remained was gasping for breath, just clinging to life, and in need of spiritual intensive care. That remaining would be lost also if there were not immediate and appropriate action.

How could a church get into such a perilous situation? The text does not reveal all that brought them to the point of death. Were there decisions made in the past which nudged them off course? Did the brethren decide **not** to do right concerning a situation, and had that opened the door to departures? Did an elder’s child involve himself in sin, and receive no rebuke because he was an elder’s child—thus undermining the strength of the righteous and emboldening the wicked?

Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life (Eze. 13:22).

Did the church overlook sin, choosing not to rock the boat, not realizing they were, all the time, drifting away, taking on water, and heading for the rocks? Was a preacher selected who was a hireling, weak, compromising, enamored with the churches of men, lazy, or immoral? Had they lost their zeal that they did not care enough to do what was right? Or, as too often happens today, had the eldership evolved into little more than a building and grounds maintenance committee, overseeing deacons who were frustrated because they did not know what their work was, and a preacher whose job description spelled out “office manager” rather than evangelist? We are not told, but we know these very things have caused the death of once-faithful churches. In many cases, the apostasy has taken only a single generation.

The sad statement: “There used to be a sound church there,” can be said of far too many places—not just Sardis. What happened? Were there symptoms of spiritual sickness? Did they have warnings before their death? Did they refuse to listen, as so many congregations, even now on the brink of death, do today?

THEY WERE DEAD UNLESS THEY WOULD REPENT AND WATCH

While the majority of adherents and proponents of false doctrines which steal the souls of men will not be persuaded even “though one rose from the dead” to instruct them (Luke 16:31), perhaps a few will take notice. If “once saved, always saved” were true, why did Jesus tell this church they were dead and needed to repent? If one “does not have to do anything to be saved,” why would the Christ condemn them for not completing their works? The truth is it is a real possibility, and one of which the Bible plainly warns, that one may turn from righteousness to unrighteousness and, consequently, be lost.

But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die (Eze. 18:24).

Yet, Christ offers hope. He was not willing that they die (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4), but offered to them spiritual resuscitation. He calls upon them to remember (Rev. 3:3)—that is, to harken back to the gospel message and their glad reception of it at the beginning (Acts 2:41). They should remember the instruction on Christian living contained therein. Not only should they remember, they should also “hold fast, and repent.” If they did not, Jesus Christ the Lord would come on them in judgment, at a time unannounced—thus, as a thief in the night without giving warning, and when they were asleep and unsuspecting. If they did not repent and watch, they would be unready and unaware until it was too late.

There were a few who still put God first (Rev. 3:4; Mat. 6:33), who would say, “not my will, but thine, be done” (cf., Luke 22:42), whose service was true (Mat. 6:24; Luke 12:37), whose prayers were effectual and fervent (Jam. 5:16), whose lives were marked by soberness, righteousness, and godliness, and by denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts

(Tit. 2:12). Their garments were clean and unspotted, and they would walk with Christ in white, “for they are worthy.” Many churches have had their lives prolonged by the faithful efforts of a godly few. They alone were the reason the church in Sardis had any hope of ever returning to where it should have been.

CONCLUSION

The church in Sardis does not appear to have suffered, as did others, from the outward attacks of false teachers and doctrines. Sadly, their demise seems to have come from within. As one said, “We have found the enemy, and he is us.” There is a cycle too often repeated in churches. They begin, work with zeal and enthusiasm, grow, do well, support good works, build membership and facilities, secure for themselves a good name, then lose their focus, decline, and slip into disfavor.

The heart-rending result is that souls are blotted out of the book of life. Cities of old, and perhaps even Sardis, had a “registry of worthy citizens, but the names of the deceased are erased.”⁷ So, God has a registry of the saved (Phi. 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:19), but from it He erases those whose works are not perfect, even though they have a name that they live, for they are dead, which is sad indeed, but true nonetheless.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²Robert R. Taylor, Jr., “Letters to the Churches of Asia, No. II,” *Studies in the Revelation*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1984), p. 109.

³Janet Tassel, “The Search for Sardis,” *Harvard Magazine*: 2, available from <http://www.harvard-magazine.com/ma98/sardis.html>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2000.

⁴Homer Hailey, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 143.

⁵The church of the New Testament is not a building, but the body of baptized believers, called out of the world by the gospel, over whom Christ is head, and in whom His Spirit dwells (Acts 2; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18; Rom. 8:9; 2 The. 2:14).

⁶See the author’s chapter on “Copying the Mega Churches, i.e. Willow Creek, Use of Self-appointed Church Experts to Grow” *Church Growth: Man’s Ways Or God’s Way?* ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 2000), pp. 73-90.

⁷Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1966), p. 98.

SAD VERSES NOT IN THE BIBLE

Gary W. Summers



Gary W. Summers and his wife Barbara have two children and one grandson. He is a graduate of Illinois State University (B.A., M.A.). He taught college for four years and was a teacher/principal of Central Illinois Christian Academy in Peoria, Illinois.

Gary has done local work in Pennsylvania, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Texas and is currently with the Pearl Street Church of Christ in Denton, Texas. He is author of many newspaper editorials and letters to editors. He writes for several brotherhood journals, and speaks on several lectureships each year.

“The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!” lamented David concerning the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in battle (2 Sam. 1:19).¹ This was both a national catastrophe (Saul being the king) and a personal tragedy, since “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David” (1 Sam. 18:1). We all mourn at such times—the more personal the loss, the more we grieve.

In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, the master of the college contrasts the two types of sorrow as he addresses those entering the university after World War I:

I take the war list, and I run down it: name after name which I cannot read and which we (who are older than you) cannot hear without emotion. Names, which will only be names to you—the new college, but which to us summon up face after face full of goodness, zeal and vigor, and intellectual promise, the flower of a generation, the glory of England. And they died for England and all that England stands for. And now by tragic necessity their dreams have become yours. Let me exhort you: examine yourselves; let each of you discover where your true chance of greatness lies. For their sakes, for the sake of your college and your country, seize this chance, rejoice in it, and let no power or persuasion deter you in your task.

In war there are thousands of fatalities; the figures do not tell the story because each number represents an individual with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, perhaps a wife, and even a child (which the fallen hero may never have seen). It is sad to think all of the soldiers who have died far away from home, apart from their families and the land that they

loved. The list of those who died at the Alamo includes several who had traveled here from other nations—only to die for the independence of Texas. We honor the memories of all those who have fought for liberty, but we especially mourn the ones we knew personally and loved.

There are times in a nation's history when the entire country is plunged into sadness. The whole United States was stunned by the attack on Pearl Harbor. That day still lives in infamy! Another well-remembered event (of a lesser magnitude) involved a plane crash with only four people aboard: Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, J. P. Richardson,² and the pilot were killed. Even 41 years later the night of February 3rd is yet remembered as "the day the music died."³ In more recent history most people can easily recall the sad experience of seeing the explosion which caused the Challenger space shuttle fall from the sky to the ocean. We all grieved to see the reactions of the families of those who perished. We shared in the students' loss of their teacher when they suddenly realized what had happened.

"Anybody here seen my old friend Bobby? Can you tell me where he's gone? I thought I saw him walkin' up over the hill with Abraham and Martin and John." Dion's 1968 tribute to four American leaders who were assassinated (Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy) expressed the grief of a nation who during the '60s lost three of these great men. The most recent tragedy to affect several nations was the untimely death of Princess Diana. Elton John's recycled tribute song touched hearts everywhere with the beginning words, "Goodbye, England's rose."

So what is it that makes a situation sad? One of the common elements in the events mentioned above involves the permanent separation that results from death. A public figure belongs to everyone. We all experience anguish—especially when someone is youthful or shows promise of much more to come that might benefit all mankind. What greatness might Jonathan have achieved serving with David in the kingdom of Israel? What might the compassionate Lincoln have done to heal the wounds of the Civil War and protect the South from carpetbaggers? What further dignity might Martin Luther King, Jr., have restored to his race? How much brilliance and potential good are destroyed in war? What might have become of some of the students at Columbine High School had their lives not been senselessly terminated?

The separation that results from death and the loss of future potential⁴ are two grief-producing stimuli. There is a third one, however, which we see time and again in the Scriptures: man's stubbornness in resisting God and doing what is right. Too many reject Jesus, who offers eternal life, in their quest for seasonal pleasures. As Jesus asked: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mat. 16:26). The destruction of a person's soul dwarfs any other tragedy. From such a perspective, then, we ought to study the Scriptures. With this view in mind, we ought to live, being evangelistic in our thinking, knowing that, in presenting the gospel to others, we have the power to keep others from ultimate and eternal sadness—from permanent despair.

How is *sadness* defined in our culture? According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the word *sad* means: "Low in spirit; dejected; sorrowful; unhappy." Our current word is derived from the Middle English word *sad*, meaning "grave, sad, full (of something)" and the Old English word *saed*, which is defined as "sated" and "weary" (1141). Does this last definition have its origin in those who have tarried too long at the Mead Hall (as described in *Beowulf*)? One can imagine those who have grown weary due to excess drinking and vain laughter. Frivolous satiation is a *sad* picture (Pro. 23:29-35). Much misery has resulted from the indulgence of alcoholic drinks or the use of other drugs, which is a vain pursuit of happiness.

THE USE OF SAD IN THE SCRIPTURES

The appearances of the word under discussion are few. The butler and the baker imprisoned with Joseph were *sad* because they did not understand the meaning of their dreams (Gen. 40:6-7). Hannah was sorrowful⁵ over not having children, but when Eli told her that her petition had been granted, she was no longer *sad* (1 Sam. 1:15-18). Jezebel asked Ahab why his spirit was so *sad* (1 Kin. 21:5). To cheer him up she hired false witnesses to testify against an innocent man, leading to his death, which is cause for genuine sadness. Nehemiah displayed a *sad* countenance in the presence of King Artaxerxes because the walls of Jerusalem remained broken down (Neh. 2:1-3).⁶

The final two appearances of *sad* in the Old Testament are in Ezekiel 13:22, "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked,

that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life.” The false prophets evidently pronounced evil things against the righteous but encouraged those who practiced sin. Today those who uphold biblical morality are called judgmental, unloving, self-righteous, Pharisaical, and the real cause of world’s problems. How ironic that sin is seldom seen as the source of society’s sorrows!

In the New Testament Jesus described the hypocrites as wearing a sad countenance when they were fasting so that people would notice them (Mat. 6:16). Of course, they were only feigning sadness. The second instance involves true sorrow—but for the wrong reason. A man approached Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life? Jesus told him to keep the commandments, which he affirmed that he had done since childhood. Jesus discerned that he loved money; so He told him to sell his possessions and give them to the poor. “And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22). How interesting that some grieve the loss of things more than they do the loss of the soul!

The remaining New Testament instance concerns the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, whom Jesus met and asked: “What manner of communications *are* these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?” (Luke 24:17). At least their sorrow was prompted by a legitimate reason: “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21). They thought their hope of redemption was gone, that Jesus was not the one they had concluded Him to be. That disappointment, had it been the case, would have been worthy of sadness (unlike the hypocritical Pharisee or the man grieving over lost wealth). The Scriptures teach: “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick” (Pro. 13:12). For over 450 years the Israelites had no prophet. All the prophecies concerning Christ remained unfulfilled. Imagine their joy and excitement when Jesus began His ministry! But then He is crucified; His earthly life came to an end. The disappointment must have been overwhelming. But they had drawn the wrong conclusion from the crucifixion; this cruel death was God’s means of providing redemption. Their mourning was turned into joy; their desire had come, and it was indeed a tree of life (Pro. 13:12).

IMAGINARY SAD STATEMENTS

There are plenty of sad statements in the Scriptures, but there are some which fortunately we do not read. If they were there, things would be drastically different. Suppose, for example, that the following passage were in the Scriptures:

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And Mary asked the centurion to move the stone. And when the soldiers rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, they entered in and saw the body of the Lord. They wept as they prepared his body for burial and remembered all the kind things he had done in his life. Many of his disciples came to the tomb, and with great sorrow of heart they departed, each to his own house (Mark 16:1-6—ISV).⁷

Such a passage would take the heart out of Christianity. We would all feel the way the two disciples on the road to Emmaus felt; hope would have departed. If Jesus is not raised from the dead, then Christianity becomes just one more world religion, no different than Buddhism or Muhammedanism. Jesus would have been merely a human being—and a rather arrogant one at that. He claimed to be the Son of God (Mark 14:61-62); He confidently asserted that He had the power to rise from the dead (John 10:17-18). The resurrection would have powerfully proclaimed Him to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). But all of these things fail if Jesus remains in the tomb. We would have no hope of our own resurrection—or eternal life, either, because all of those promises are tied up in His ability to be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:13-17). Saul of Tarsus would never have been converted by an appearance of the resurrected Christ had Jesus remained in the tomb. Half of all the New Testament books could not then have been written. There would be no gospel as we know it since that message includes His arising from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Even the future judgment of the world would remain uncertain since it too depends on the Lord's resurrection (Acts 17:31).

Jesus would have been labeled an imposter and a fraud. The Jews would probably have delighted in giving guided tours of His tomb so they could mock Him: "Here lies the man who said He was the Son of God,

but He proved to be as mortal as the rest of us.” As the reader knows, the sad passage quoted earlier does not exist. Jesus is raised from the dead. How grateful we should be every day that **He arose!** Our faith is not in vain; we have forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life.

Pride

The Scriptures provide numerous examples of the dangers of pride which effectively warn us; Bible students are also grateful for the examples of humility that the Word includes (Luke 18:13-14). But let us consider a few examples of pride that are not in the Bible.

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and cast it to the dogs. And she said, “Well, that tears it. I’ve been begging you and your disciples for help, and all I get are insults. Let me tell you something. I would rather see my daughter be perpetually afflicted than to be treated like this. I do not deserve such racial slurs, and I’m not going to take it. Good-bye” (Mat. 15:25-28—ISV).

The trouble with making sure that we are treated properly is that the greater good that might have been accomplished never happens. Such an outburst might have made the woman feel better temporarily, but her daughter would have remained “grievously vexed with a devil” (Mat. 15:22). When we allow pride to dictate our actions, the consequences of our behavior reap sadness.

Had Abigail not intervened, how might David’s future been altered? If one of Nabal’s servants had not apprized her of the situation, how would the text have read after David received Nabal’s refusal to help him and his men?

And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men, and two hundred abode by the stuff. And David avenged himself of his enemies that day with his own hand, because Nabal had done evil to David. And by the morning light there was not one of Nabal’s descendants left, or any of his servants. But the people of the land, when they heard of Nabal’s destruction, began to fear David and his men, and they begged Saul to protect them (1 Sam. 25:13-15—ISV).

David may have suddenly become the villain in the eyes of the people. This one hasty action might have prevented him from being an effective leader; it may have caused the Israelites to view him with suspicion. Nabal was a fool, and he deserved to be punished, but God could take

care of him (as is evidenced by what happened). How sad that David might have severely impaired his ability to govern by taking vengeance out of anger. If “brightest links of life are broken by a single angry word,” what harm might follow from an emotionally-charged hasty action?

Moses had an opportunity to let pride take control of him. When he returned from the mount after forty days, he found Israel engaged in revelry and idol worship.

And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses answered and said, Who can resist your will, O Lord? I will remain thy faithful servant (Exo. 32:9-11—ISV).

Instead, Moses pleaded for the Israelites. A lesser man would have thought about the glory that would be his if God raised up a nation from him. Moses, however, was not interested in taking Abraham’s place as chief patriarch. He had compassion on the people though they were guilty of violating God’s holy laws which they had just heard Him speak six weeks previously. His humble response, speaking as defense counsel for the nation, does him credit. We should all possess such magnanimity toward those who plague us.

Satan tempted Jesus with an appeal to pride at the outset of His ministry. He bid the Lord to cast Himself off the pinnacle of the temple and quoted Scripture which he applied this way: “You’re too important for God to let anything happen to You. He needs You to fulfill His scheme of redemption. If you step off the temple, He will keep You safe and preserve You.” Jesus refused to do such a foolish thing or tempt the Father with such frivolous actions (Mat. 4:5-7). But that was not the last occasion that Satan pulled pride out of his bag to see if it could get the job done. There was a temptation of this kind made as Jesus suffered on the cross.

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. And immediately the nails came out of the wood, and the wounds in his hands and feet were healed. Jesus descended to the ground, and said to those who mocked him, Believest thou now that I am the Son of God? (Mat. 27:39-42—ISV).

Although readers of this imaginary text might at first rejoice that Jesus is vindicated by such an action, the celebration must be short-lived as we stop to think: “Wait a minute. What about salvation for us?” Such was the paradox that Jesus faced. If He came down from the cross, He effectively ruined our opportunity for salvation. He could not die just any death. It had to be one in which he was lifted up (John 12:32). Furthermore, He had prophesied specifically of the manner of His death (Mat. 20:19).

Satan was appealing to Jesus’ pride. We are all tempted to vindicate ourselves—especially when we are innocent. Most of us do not want to accept punishment or chastisement when we are guilty, let alone when we are suffering abuse and our rights have been trampled. Did not Jesus loathe injustice as strongly as we do? Was He not in full agreement with Proverbs 17:15, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both *are* abomination to the LORD”? Was He not indignant when the righteous Abel was slain? Did he not grieve the loss of the honorable Naboth? Jesus, however, refused to give in to appeals based on pride. He would neither step off the pinnacle of the temple nor step down from the cross.

Likewise, Saul of Tarsus did not succumb to pride’s rationale. As a fanatical Jew, he could not casually deny what had been the focus of his life. Pride might have caused the Scriptures to read thus:

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And Saul said, How can I be anything but a Jew? Thou knowest that I was circumcised the eighth day, that I am from the tribe of Benjamin, and that I am a dedicated Pharisee, a Hebrew of Hebrews. You know that I have lived in all good conscience before thee and been very zealous. Please do not ask me to turn my back on everything I have ever known (Acts 9:5-7—ISV).

What a great loss it would have been for the entire world, not to mention Saul personally, if he had reasoned as so many do today: “I was born a Pharisee, and I’ll die a Pharisee!” Saul forsook the religion of his fathers when he learned the Truth. In so doing, he was far more noble than so many who refuse to listen to the Truth or reject it when they do hear it because it would cause division in the family (Mat. 10:34-36). Saul, once he was baptized and became a follower of Jesus, could not go home again. His fellow Pharisees would refuse to hear the gospel. The Jews

would look upon him as a traitor. To his friends he would be as one who had died.

And Saul did die—to the flesh: “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Phi. 3:7). The blessings of salvation, the privilege of being a servant of Christ, and the crown of life that await the faithful are worth whatever fleshly ties must be sacrificed. Will a Christian be disowned and disinherited? So be it. Will he lose a job or some of his income? Jesus more than compensates. Must a person separate from one to whom he is unlawfully married? Earthly pleasures are brief. Will persecution for righteousness’ sake come upon us? It is not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

It would have been sad for Saul to have passed up the unsearchable riches of Christ for fleshly ties, but it is no more sad than when people today, based on pride of family, insist: “I was born a Catholic (Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, et al.), and I’ll die a Catholic.” We grieve over those who will be lost because of mistaken loyalties. Paul, in discouraging division in Corinth, asked: “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:13). The same can be said of relatives: “Was your father (or grandfather) crucified for you? Were you baptized in your mother’s (or your uncle’s) name? Has your departed loved one risen from the grave; is he or she now seated on the right hand of the Father?” Our first allegiance must be Jesus; He will not settle for putting anyone ahead of Him (Luke 14:26-27).

Compromise

Not only will pride keep people out of heaven, so will compromise. Christians in the first century were fearless with respect to their faith. Their convictions were unshakable. How sad that some today, like Reuben, are as unstable as water. Sad would have been the Scripture that read:

And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Can’t we all just get along? There is plenty of room in Jerusalem for thee and us. We will not seek to impose our religion upon the Jews in public any more if thou wilt not beat us further. We both call God our Father; and so we be brethren. We strongly believe in the resurrection of Christ, but for all we know, we could be wrong.

Nothing should stand in the way of unity between us (Acts 4:18-22—ISV).

True Christians in the first century were not concerned about *getting along* with the Jewish authorities or the prevailing customs and attitudes of the time. “We ought to obey God rather than men,” they insisted (Acts 5:29). Sadly, the church has lost its zeal for Jesus Christ, Who is the Word (John 1:1-3, 14), Who is Truth (John 17:17). When people decide that doctrine only divides brethren and is, therefore, to be *minimized* (translated “set aside”), they have given up the teaching of the Lord (Mat. 16:12) and the serious exhortation of Paul to Timothy: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16).

Christianity, the church, and its doctrine are all distinctive. There is no basis whatever to fellowship those who have never obeyed the gospel, who in fact preach a false gospel, and who (regarding New Testament teaching) do not speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). Paul asks, “What communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14)? Light and truth are used interchangeably in the Scriptures (1 John 1:5-7; 3 John 3-4). When we obey the gospel, God delivers us “from the power of darkness” and translates us “into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). How can we, who are in the kingdom of light, fellowship those who remain in the kingdom of darkness? Paul said we have no communion one with another.

It is sad beyond measure that some brethren, who have yet to grasp this simple fact (or who simply no longer care), are extending the right hand of fellowship with those who have never been born again. They not only bring reproach upon the church (the genuine body of believers); they shame the Lord Jesus Christ by fellowshipping spiritually those who are not His. Apparently, they have forgotten that “the church is subject unto Christ” (Eph. 5:24). How ludicrous it would have been for Paul to have written: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned—and fellowship them” (Rom. 16:17—ISV)!

Scarcely could more be done to destroy the church than what certain congregations (who still call themselves the church of Christ) are doing by conducting unity meetings with those outside of Christ. These *brethren* do not believe the Truth and have no love of the Truth (2 The. 2:10), or such an idea would not even be considered; they do not practice the

Truth (when they have communion with those in darkness): in fact, they despise the Truth, which means they despise the Lord who bought them, as well as His precious blood. How His heart must break to see the current compromise, led by those who have not a hundredth part of the courage and the conviction of Peter and John.

Grace

Perhaps we do not always realize the importance of the grace of God. What if there was nothing further to write after Genesis 6:7? We would not be here to contemplate such things, and none of those who lived on earth up until that point would have been redeemed. What if God had said to Israel through the Old Testament prophets: “You will be taken into captivity and languish in a foreign land; there will be no remnant left to return”?

And what about us today? Does God regret that He has allowed the world to stand this long? How many opportunities have we been given to render Him service that we have ignored because of our materialism, our selfishness, and our apathy? How often have we given in to sin when we might have fought a little harder? Indeed, God has been gracious to allow us time for repentance, but we must not continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). We as Christians, above all others, should be mindful of His grace. Separation from family and friends due to the severity of circumstances is sad. The loss of a loved one prompts grief. But the saddest soul of all will be the one who knew the Lord’s will and departed from it (as Demas did) or the one who knew the Truth, but refused to obey it. Felix, Festus, and Agrippa can only blame themselves on the day of judgment for their failure to obey the gospel. The rich man suffering the torments of hell could not blame anyone but himself for his condition. These men made their own decisions and are paying for the choices they made. It is sad that they selected the wrong option, but sadder still is that nothing can be changed on the other side of the grave. When we depart from this earth, the opportunity to avail ourselves of God’s grace ceases.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that several factors can produce sadness: death, separation, the frivolous wasting of a human life and its potential, dreams that never come to fruition, reality that is painful, an individual’s pride

that keeps him from obeying God, the spirit of compromise, and probably others that have not been mentioned. 1 Kings 11-14 provides a historical account of the descent of Israel that parallels the one that occurred after the death of Joshua, although it is not as detailed. What else can one do but weep, after reading that the people switched from serving “the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel” (Jud. 2:7) to “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers” (Jud. 2:11-12).

The blessings of God, the prosperity, the peace they enjoyed were all lost due to their rejection of God. They brought their own problems upon themselves. No person and no nation can disobey God with impunity. Yet knowing this fact, the book of Judges records this same behavior pattern continuously, as though God’s people were in an endless loop. How sad that needless suffering existed and that the children of God’s own people were born into a pagan society that worshipped idols.

First Kings 11-14 provides a more detailed description of the process of apostasy. Solomon enjoyed a peaceful reign; the prosperity of the kingdom was at its zenith. All of this will change rapidly—primarily due to Solomon’s folly: “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kin. 11:4). He not only allowed false worship to occur within the realm; he built high places for Chemosh, Moab, and for the gods of all his foreign wives (1 Kin. 11:7-8). For this reason, God arranged for Israel to be divided into the northern and southern kingdoms.

Although God had determined that the split would occur, the means by which it came about was through the foolishness of Rehoboam. He refused to listen to the voice of wisdom; so the ten northern tribes made Jeroboam king (1 Kin. 12:20). As sad as this division was, it is only the beginning of woes. Almost immediately Jeroboam feared that the people would return to Jerusalem to worship; so he instituted four changes in worship (1 Kin. 12:25-33), one of which involved two new locations for worship that would keep the people under his control. These alterations remained for the next two centuries.

For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them;

Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day (2 Kin. 17:21-23).

How sad that no one challenged Jeroboam and said, “Who do you think you are to change the worship of the Lord our God?” Instead children grew up for the next two hundred years thinking that what they practiced was acceptable to God when in actuality it was **a great sin!!** How many today are being raised according to the traditions of men? How many, like their counterparts in Israel, think they are pleasing to God by following the religious doctrines and commandments of men?

Jeroboam knew that he was in error. A man of God came and preached precisely that message to him (1 Kin. 13:1-5). But then that prophet also failed to pay heed to the message that God had given him. He listened to the words of an old prophet who assured him it would be all right for him to eat and drink in the city after all. “*But* he lied unto him” (1 Kin. 13:18). Like Eve, he knew what God told him; he should have never allowed himself to be convinced otherwise. On his way home he was attacked and killed by a lion. It is just as sad today when people have the word of God before them, but they listen to those who contradict what is recorded therein. False teachers tell them that salvation is by “faith only” when the Scriptures clearly include repentance and baptism for the remission of their sins. Too often people settle for the word of someone who is lying to them (or who is himself blind, yet trying to lead others).

Jeroboam is given one last opportunity to repent. When his child becomes sick, his wife visits Ahijah, who tells her that her son will die as soon as her feet enter the city. But this is not the worst part of the prophecy. Concerning Jeroboam’s other children, Ahijah says: “Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken *it*” (1 Kin. 14:11). Jeroboam could have said, “I cannot do this to my family; it is not worth the price of being king. I will remove the golden calves at Dan and Bethel and make other necessary changes. I will humble myself before God and repent. Who knows? Perhaps he will be gracious to me and relent concerning the evil He hath promised to bring upon my posterity.” Unfortunately, Jeroboam never said these words, and all that had been prophesied came to pass.

Meanwhile, what happened to Rehoboam and Judah? Due to the division, the kingdom was smaller and less able to defend itself. The king of Egypt came up and conquered them:

And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And king Rehoboam made in their stead brasen shields (1 Kin. 14:26-27).

The once-expansive and glorious kingdom of Solomon had in just a few years become reduced to a small territory with phony splendor.

It need not have happened. If Solomon had not compromised with his wives and let false religion into the land, all of these things could have been avoided. What a great lesson for the church to learn today! If only members of the body of Christ would be faithful to our Lord and Savior, we could avoid the heartaches that will come as a result of apostasy. How will Solomon feel on the day of judgment when he realizes the amount of Israelites that ultimately wound up being lost because of events he helped put into motion? How will some of the liberals among us feel when they see their children condemned to eternal torment because they never encouraged them to be obedient to God in all things?

How will we feel if we give God anything less than the best we can or if we fail to set the right example? The future depends on us. May we be faithful so that future generations will not have to look back upon us with heavy hearts! One “Play on, Miss Bertha” a century is more than enough.⁸ Let us rather determine to “contend for the faith” at all costs (Jude 3). Let us enter eternity with the words of Paul upon our lips: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). Earth’s sorrows will be swallowed up in victory!

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

²J. P. Richardson went by the name of “The Big Bopper.”

³Don Mclean’s famous 1971-72 song, “American Pie” (not to be confused with the recent vulgar movie with the same title), refers to the death of Buddy Holly in this plane crash as “the day the music died,” which is a play on words from one of Holly’s songs—“That’ll Be the Day (When I Die).”

⁴Talents and abilities may also be lost not only in the case of death, but due to an accident or a crippling injury.

⁵*Sorrow, sorrowed, sorroweth, sorrowful, sorrowing, and sorrows* appear a total of 114 times in the Bible (69, 2, 1, 18, 2, and 22 times respectively): 32 of these are New Testament usages.

⁶*Sad* appears one time in each of the first three verses of Nehemiah 2.

⁷ISV stands for the Imaginary Standard Version.

⁸See Tom Wacaster's chapter in *Looking Unto Jesus: The Author and Finisher of Our Faith*, ed. Tommy Hicks, for background information on this phrase (Lubbock, TX: Southside Church of Christ, 1999), pp. 196-223.