

Preaching From The Major Prophets

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2008 Bellview Lectures

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Preaching From The Major Prophets

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PREFACE

A study of the prophets by every congregation and Christian would help the church today. The church is currently faced with liberalism on every hand. Individuals continually reject the message God has given. The false teachers of the twenty-first century are saying many of the same things that the false prophets were saying then: “Peace, Peace; when *there is* no peace” (Jer. 6:14). Preachers/teachers need to know how to respond as God would have us. A study of the prophets will enable us to respond properly. Many Christians are living and acting in the same manner as their Israelite counterparts. We learn how God would have us deal with these rebellious and complacent brethren, and what God would have us say to them.

There are also numerous predictive prophecies concerning the church of our Lord found in the prophets. Thus, we learn a great deal about the nature of the kingdom/church and of the Messiah through a study of the prophets.

It is imperative that we express our appreciation to numerous individuals who play such an important role in making this lectureship and the book a success. First are the elders of the Bellview congregation. Without their loving oversight and foresight, these lectures would not have begun nor continued. They have a great love for the Lord, His Word, the church, and all things spiritual. Appreciation is also expressed to this congregation, who (though small in number) willingly work so hard for the Cause we all love.

No lectureship could exist without those men who are willing to speak (and write chapters for the book). This involves many hours of intensive labor and these men are freely willing to give of themselves for the Lord and His church.

As usual, special appreciation is expressed to our secretary, Denise Mowery, and Gary Summers for their work on the book. Sister Mowery does the formatting for the book, checks references for accuracy, along with reading each chapter. Brother Summers does a final proofreading to ensure proper grammar and accuracy in every way. We are thankful for the work both do for the lectureship and the book.

It is our fervent prayer that this book will aid elders, preachers, and every member of the Lord’s church. We know that those things “written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

Michael Hatcher, Director and Editor; March 22, 2008

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS

Gary W. Summers

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Gary and his wife Barbara have been married for 41 years; they have two children and four grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

If there is one area of biblical study that receives less attention than any other, it would be that of the “major” and “minor” prophets. The reasons for this neglect are: (1) The major prophets (except for Daniel) are too lengthy to either preach through or do an in-depth study of; (2) With the exception of certain historical sections that are easy to understand, such as Isaiah 36-39, Jeremiah 35-44, or Daniel 1-6, many of the portions are difficult to comprehend, especially when the subject matter shifts several times within a few verses; (3) Brethren grow weary with similar messages of doom (despite the diverse illustrations used to express the coming destruction); and (4) Many brethren do not possess a sense of context out of which these messages come.

Nevertheless, the material is rich with visual images and verbal gems. Several chapters in this book deal with both of these, but many more cannot be fully covered. This introduction to the prophets will deal with these men, their work, and some of the outstanding messages that God communicated to His people of old.

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR WORK

Prophets are an integral part of Old Testament Bible study; long before we ever get to those who have books named after them, we have already been introduced to such great men as Elijah and Elisha, whose lives and deeds are discussed in 1-2 Kings. The Bible also speaks of

“the sons of the prophets,” which refers to groups of men who were dedicated to preaching (2 Kin. 2:3, 5, 7, 16; 3:13; 4:1, 38). Prior to these men was the courageous Nathan who confronted the sin-laden King David by telling him: “Thou art the man!” (2 Sam. 12:7—KJV). Samuel and Moses (Deu. 18:15, 18-19) also come to mind as prophets, as well as David himself (Acts 2:29-30).

Who receives the credit for being the first prophet? How about Abraham (Gen. 20:7)? Was there anyone before him? Although Noah is not called a prophet, per se, he was warned of the flood to come (Heb. 11:7) and proclaimed that upcoming event to those in sin, since he was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). Could anyone possibly have come before him? Jude wrote that “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied” (Jude 14-15), which makes this righteous man a prophet. But we can go back even further—to Abel, who is counted among the prophets by Jesus in Luke 11:47-51 (Clarke 10). Actually, Adam might be the first prophet even though the term is not applied to him. Prophets have been on earth since the world began (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21), and it is certain that Adam was the first to proclaim the will of God to his children. When he told succeeding generations about God’s commands and his and Eve’s disobedience, he was proclaiming truth, and if he ever repeated Genesis 3:15, he foretold a future event.

What was just described above is actually the work of a prophet. To put it in a more formal way, these men of God have the obligation: (1) To set forth the Word of God (truth) before men; (2) To call people to repentance to avoid future judgment; and (3) To call people to repentance to enjoy future blessings for the obedient. These elements can be observed in every instance (either directly or by implication). Each of these duties deserves a fuller treatment.

Declaring God’s Word

The prophet has the responsibility to deliver God’s Word—and only God’s Word. Even the covetous Balaam understood this point. When Balak chastised him for blessing Israel, he retorted: “Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?” (Num. 23:12). Even the prophets have free will and could alter the message (at their own risk). God had forewarned Balaam, however: Twice the Lord spoke to him, giving him permission to go to the king of Moab but warning him each time to utter “only the word which I speak to you” (22:21, 35). Balaam had the good sense to comply in his speech, but his

greed got the better of him; he advised the Moabites how to get God to curse Israel (25:1-3; 31:16).

God told Jeremiah: “And whatever I command you, you shall speak” (Jer. 1:7b). Then He put forth His hand and touched his mouth, saying: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth” (1:9). God did **not** say that He put His thoughts or His ideas into his head, but rather He put His words into his mouth. David was likewise inspired in this manner; he wrote: “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word *was* on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). The New Testament confirms: “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter specifically mentions that “holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Paul spoke and wrote the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37); so did these faithful prophets of old.

Furthermore, the proclaimer of God’s Word was charged to speak “all the words” that God commanded him; he was not to “diminish a word” (Jer. 26:2). After Jerusalem had been destroyed and Gedaliah the governor had been assassinated, the people begged Jeremiah to ask the Lord what they should do. He assured them that he would petition God on their behalf and that he would declare the answer to them: “I will keep nothing back from you” (42:4). Today’s preachers also have the obligation to declare “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

When the people rejected the prophet, they were rejecting God. The Lord explained this principle to Samuel when the Israelites insisted upon having a king. God said to heed their voice, adding that “they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). God told Samuel to warn the people what life would be like under a king, which he did. “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel” (8:19). They actually were rejecting the words of God. Many centuries later God lamented that this condition had persisted:

I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*, saying, “Turn now everyone from his evil way, amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them; then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and your fathers.” But you have not inclined your ear, nor obeyed Me (Jer. 35:15).

This verse teaches: (1) God sent the prophets; (2) They communicated to the people the truths that God wanted them to hear; (3) The people refused to listen; and (4) In rejecting the message of the prophets, the people, therefore, rejected God and did not obey Him. Preach-

ers who declare God's Word today (assuming that they are speaking "as the oracles of God" [1 Pet. 4:11] and not "out of their own heart" [Eze. 13:2]) should likewise be obeyed.

Repentance to Avoid Judgment

Throughout time God has given warnings to all nations but especially to His own people, as the above passage from Jeremiah 35:15 shows. The forewarning of judgment to come usually implies that repentance can change things. The people of Nineveh certainly thought so when Jonah came with his message of doom: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jon. 3:4). The people reasoned that, since they had been warned, repentance might change things; so all the inhabitants of the entire city humbled themselves—from the greatest to the least (3:6-10). God did turn from His fierce wrath and allowed the city to remain. It was always His goal to obtain repentance, but never was the message of the prophets more taken to heart and heeded than in this pagan city.

Perhaps the most eloquent plea to His own people was recorded in Ezekiel 33:11:

Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

The message of the New Testament is identical, although it is addressed to individuals rather than to nations. The Gospel message is one of a personal message, and the choice is between eternal life and eternal death. Jesus told the people: "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Years later, Paul proclaimed the same warning:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The reason God warns people through His prophets of impending personal doom is to provide them an opportunity to repent. What this reveals about God is that He does indeed love us; otherwise, He would remain silent and let us enter into eternity both ignorant and unprepared. Through Noah, "a preacher of righteousness," God warned those of the first great destruction of the world (2 Pet. 2:5). The New Testa-

ment warns all mankind of the final destruction of the world through fire (3:9-13). It also warns of the punishment of eternal fire upon the ungodly (Rev. 20:12-15).

Repentance to Enjoy Future Blessings

When people repented at the preaching of the prophets, they received numerous blessings, not the least of which was peace and prosperity in the land. When Moses gave God's covenant to them, he promised great blessings to them:

And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand (Deu. 28:11-12).

When Israel sinned, God removed all these things from them, but when they repented, He would restore them once more. Later, God promised to restore His people to the land after their captivity. Great promises were further made for a time after that—the Messianic age. This would be a time of great rejoicing and spiritual refreshment—but only the penitent would appreciate it fully and participate in it (Isa. 65:17-19).

Under that new covenant, those who repent obtain many blessings. John the baptizer preached: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Mat. 3:2). Today, one must still repent to get into that kingdom (the church) (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Those who remain faithful avoid the second death, which is in the lake of fire. Instead, they are invited into the holy city, the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:5), which (unlike Rome) is the true eternal city. It is a place where pure water flows and the tree of life is present. Greatest of all is the fact that the throne of God and the Lamb is there (22:1-3).

Repentance always offers these two options—avoiding punishment and receiving a great reward. Some are always trying to discount the motive of fear, arguing that we should all just concentrate on loving God. Yet it is God that put both motives in the Scriptures. The prophets used both to persuade Israel; Jesus and His apostles likewise used them. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the Bible, saw fit to include them. To omit the warnings of destruction upon the ungodly would be to diminish or take away from the Word of God. If all of the passages of the

prophets (both in the Old and New Testaments) that foretold grievous punishment were removed, we would only have a fraction of it left, and thus it would no longer be the Word of God.

This section on the work of the prophets closes with observations made by Frank Dunn in his excellent book, *Know Your Bible*. He includes these points in his chapter, "Introduction to the Books of Prophecy," under the heading, "God's purpose in calling the prophets" (236-37).

1. The prophet was primarily a spokesman for God, divinely called to instruct and exhort the people in the law (Jer. 1:4-10).
2. Through the prophets God revealed His will in the Old Testament period, mainly upon occasions of a great moment (Heb. 1:1).
3. The prophets had a message first of all relevant to the moral and religious conditions of their own day.
4. They forewarned and admonished rulers, often face to face.
5. They preserved in written form the messages they received direct from God.
6. They recorded a history of their times.
7. The prophets counteracted all idolatrous tendencies.
8. They were examples of great faith and courage, for most of them suffered persecution and death because of their preaching (Acts 7:52).
9. The message of the prophets is relevant also to our day because the basic issues do not change (Rom. 15:4).
10. Their writings were inspired of God (II Tim. 3:16) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:21).
11. Christ's first coming and the beginning of the church are important subjects of Old Testament prophecy (Rom. 1:2; Acts 3:24-26; I Peter 1:10-11).
12. God's final revelation, the New Testament, was made through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 17:5). He is the greatest of all the prophets (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37).

THE MAJOR PROPHETS

Having discussed the work and the basic message of the prophets, we now turn our attention toward the men and the context of their writing. Scholars usually differentiate between the major and the minor prophets, which primarily refers to the amount of pages each man wrote. When the chapter and verse divisions were added to the Bible, Isaiah received the most (66), but Jeremiah (52) wrote more text even

before counting the book of Lamentations. Even though Ezekiel contains only 48 chapters, it is equal in length to Isaiah. Although Daniel is less than a third the size of these mighty works, nevertheless, this book is about twice the size of the largest of the minor prophet books (Hosea and Zechariah).

Isaiah

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prophesied at the end of Uzziah's reign, all of Jotham's, Ahaz's, and Hezekiah's (about 740 to 680 B.C.), which makes him the earliest of the major prophets. During the reigns of Uzziah in the south and Jeroboam II in the north, Judah and Israel were at their highest point since the reign of Solomon. The expanse of their territories and their prosperity would never be this great again. After Jeroboam's death, Israel went through a stormy final 50 years, with five of the last six kings being assassinated. Isaiah observed most of that deterioration, as well as the northern kingdom being taken into captivity by Assyria in 721 B.C. In the south, Jotham continued in his father Uzziah's footsteps, but the people acted corruptly. His son Ahaz was arguably the most evil king in Judah up to that point, refusing even to ask a sign of the Lord when bidden to do so (Isa. 7). Hezekiah followed him and was a good king—one who sought Isaiah's counsel and assistance when Assyria threatened to take them captive, also. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah lived on into the evil Manasseh's reign and was sawn in half at his command. Some think Isaiah's death as a martyr is referenced in Hebrews 11:37, although no specific name is mentioned.

Isaiah's name means "Salvation is from Jehovah," which is appropriate, since *salvation* appears twenty-six times in his book but only seven times in the other prophets combined. Not coincidentally, Isaiah records several prophecies concerning Jesus (Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 52:13-53:12), through Whom comes the salvation of the soul, as well as the church (2:2-4). The following truths are affirmed in Isaiah's writings.

1. Salvation comes by trusting God (both physical and spiritual salvation).
2. Ethical living is essential. (Too often people wrongly separate faith from behavior.)
3. God is holy (6:3).
4. Sin offends God (59:1-2).

5. Divine judgment is inevitable (as the whole history of Israel demonstrates).

6. There is redemption for those sincerely penitent.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah, whose name means, “exalted of Jehovah,” was the son of Hilkiah and had a God-ordained mission to preach to Judah. If Isaiah passed from the scene in 680 B.C., Jeremiah (and the other major prophets) did not arise for more than 50 years—after the deaths of Manasseh and Amon. He began his work in the thirteenth year of Josiah (c. 627 B.C.) (Jer. 1:2). He preached to a rebellious people for around forty-five years, perhaps dying in Egypt around 582 B.C. He was chosen by God from before birth to be a prophet “to the nations” (1:5-6). His father was a priest in Anathoth, about three miles north of Jerusalem, which was part of the tribe of Benjamin (Jos. 21:18). He was not allowed to marry (Jer. 16:2). He dictated his writings to Baruch (45:1) before, during, and after their exile. He was known as the “weeping prophet” because of his deep grief and concern for his people.

Since Jeremiah began his work at a young age, he knew that his youth would be a hindrance in his preaching, but God told him not to worry—that He would deliver him (1:7-8). God touched his mouth and said, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant” (1:9-10). On one occasion, Jeremiah wanted to quit being a prophet, because the work was so difficult, but the Word of God was within him, and he could not keep it back; it was like a fire burning inside his bones (20:9). Although he prophesied against Egypt (46), Philistia (47), Moab (48), Babylon (50-51), Ammon, Edom, and others (49), most of his preaching was aimed at Jerusalem and foretelling their destruction by Babylon.

It is not difficult to comprehend this prophet’s discouragement since God challenged him to find even one man who was faithful to God in the entire city of Jerusalem, and he could not do so. Most preachers know that a certain segment of the congregation is ignoring every word he says, but few of us ever experience 100% rejection. Key words are *forsake*, *backsliding*, and *return*. Furthermore, his life was in peril more than once. Not only would he be imprisoned, but on one occasion he would be lowered into a miry pit—and saved by a eunuch of Ethiopia

named Ebed-Melech (38:1-13). His faith in God, however, preserved him to preach more than four decades.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel, whose name means “God strengthens,” was the son of Buzi. He is the last of the major prophets to begin his work (c. 592 B.C.). At this point, Jeremiah has only ten years remaining and Daniel has already begun his work. Although Daniel was part of the first deportation (c. 606-605 B.C.), Ezekiel was among those enslaved during the second wave in 597 B.C. God did not call him for another five years, when he reached the age of 30. His work concluded much earlier than Daniel’s 70-year span; he prophesied only twenty-two years (Eze. 1:2; 29:17).

The first part of his labor required him to spend a great deal of his time refuting the false prophets. First, they had declared that Jerusalem was safe and that there would be no captivity; in other words, Jeremiah and other prophets were totally wrong. Now, after two deportations to Babylon, were the false prophets embarrassed? No, they just altered their message to say, “We’ll all be back to Jerusalem soon.” Truly, people hear what they want to believe. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem, encouraging King Zedekiah and the people alike to repent to avoid the impending destruction (from 597 to 586, when it actually occurred). Ezekiel, on the other hand, was among the captives, and from 592 to 586 preached to them that: (1) Jerusalem would be destroyed (despite the assurances to the contrary of the false prophets); (2) The captives would not be returning to their land (at least, not until 536—if any were still alive).

After the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was completely vindicated, since everything he had foretold had come to pass. Then he shifted the focus of his attention to the restoration that would come. He conveys the picture of the valley of dry bones (36-37), portrays God’s protection over His people (38-39), and describes a new temple, a new worship, and a new land (40-48). *Glory* is a significant word in Ezekiel’s writing, occurring more than twenty times, as does the clause, *they will know that I am the Lord*. Ezekiel is designated as the *son of man* more than ninety times; this same phrase is used of Jesus in the New Testament almost eighty times.

Daniel

Daniel was an important influence for more than 70 years. He was taken to Babylon in 606-605 B.C. and was still faithful to God after 536 B.C. At the time he was removed from Jerusalem, Jeremiah was only about halfway through his work, and Ezekiel had not yet been called of God (although his tenure as a prophet would be completed more than 35 years before Daniel's).

Daniel means "God is my judge." He was a young Jew of royal birth (a prince) at the time of the captivity. Shortly after his arrival in Babylon, he interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and was thereafter a trusted and high-ranking advisor to the king. Of the four major prophets, Daniel enjoyed consistent honor. Isaiah was highly regarded by Hezekiah (and probably Uzziah and Jotham) but not so much with Ahaz or Manasseh (who, according to tradition, ordered his death). Jeremiah, after the death of Josiah, was not respected by any of the kings or the people. Ezekiel did not have much of an audience before the destruction of Jerusalem; presumably, more people were interested in the hope of the future he described in the restoration.

Daniel was known as a righteous man who refused to compromise—either with eating the king's food upon first arriving in Babylon (1) or in refusing to pray for 30 days to anyone but the king (6). Furthermore, he was courageous in telling Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king on earth, that he would live like an animal for seven years (4) and Belshazzar that his kingdom would be coming to an end the very night that the handwriting appeared on the wall (5). Facing a den of lions is no job for a lukewarm, indecisive soul, either. Daniel's faith is strong throughout his life.

GEMS FROM THE PROPHETS

How can a task of this size be done justice? Many of the chapters in this lectureship book are devoted to a verse or a larger text, and these are only the beginning. Below, we will go through book by book, calling attention to striking truths that could not be covered in a volume of this size.

Isaiah

In Isaiah 1:18 we read: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Af-

ter the description of God's people leading up to this verse (the whole head is sick), one might wonder: "Why does He care?" Nevertheless, He desires to reason with them—and to remove their sins. All it would require on their part was repentance. The same is true today on an individual basis. The blood of Christ is the only cleansing agent that can remove sins (Rev. 1:5).

Immediately following this plea of God with His people is the famous prophecy concerning the church. The mountain of Jehovah's house referred to Mt. Moriah, which is also called Zion, where Solomon's temple was built. The New Testament reveals that the prophet is describing the spiritual temple, the church (Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:4-5). Following are a few key points of this passage (2:1-5).

1. It would come about in the latter days (Heb. 1:1-3).
2. The mountain of the Lord's house would be established and exalted (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2).
3. All nations (Gentiles, as well as Jews) would flow unto it (Eph. 2:14-19, Gal. 3:28).
4. The Law will come forth from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Acts 1:8; 2:16-41).
5. The result would be peace among the nations (John 14:27; Eph. 2:17).
6. The whole earth would be able to walk in the light of the Lord (John 8:12).

What a great time in which to live—to see the fulfillment of this and other prophecies in Christ and in the church! Would those alive to witness these things appreciate the privilege they were given?

Although those great blessings are in the future, at the time of Isaiah's writing God has forsaken His people because they are filled "with eastern ways," as well as prosperity and idolatry. God would bring down every lofty thing in which they took pride and utterly abolish idols. People would finally cast them aside after seeing the terror and glory of the Lord (Isa. 2:6-22). Even the women of the nation (often the last bastion of decency) had "wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they" went. They were vain, but their finery would be taken away and replaced by sackcloth. Their sashes would be exchanged for ropes, and baldness would replace their well-set hair (3:16-26). Seven women would vie to be a man's wife (4:1). Truly, such is the folly of people's complacency, as they rebel against God. Today many in Hollywood all

but taunt God in the immorality they portray in movies—as though a sad recompense were not coming.

Isaiah envisioned Israel as a vineyard (Jer. 12:10; Psa. 80; John 15:1-8), which God had planted with the choicest vine. He expected good grapes but was sorely disappointed; He even asks what more He could have done? The only thing left to do was to tear it down, burn it, and lay it waste (Isa. 5:1-6). Some of the evil fruit the vineyard had produced included oppression (rather than justice), continuous drinking parties (from early in the morning until the night), entertainment obsession (does this sound like America?), and twisted values, such as calling good evil and evil good (5:9-20). (An entire book could be written concerning the ways the enemies of God are doing this very thing today.) Furthermore, they were wise in their own eyes and mighty at drinking wine; they justified the wicked for bribes and removed justice from the righteous (5:21-23). Because they rejected the law of the Lord, God sentenced them to foreign defeat. Their corpses would be as garbage in the streets. Their attackers would be quick and unsparing, engulfing Palestine (5:24-30). When will men ever learn the simple lesson that bad behavior merits punishment?

How often have preachers called attention to the volunteer spirit of Isaiah (6:8)? If brethren expressed their real attitudes in song, they would be more accurately pointing to a brother and warbling: “Here am I; send him.” To say that 10% of the members do 90% of the work is probably an exaggeration, but few could deny that an imbalance exists in most churches. Congregations need brethren who have initiative and the willingness to accomplish the work with which God has charged us. Grace teaches that we should be zealous for good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

God denounced the use of mediums and wizards first in Deuteronomy 18:10-12—not because they have any real power, but they involve the use of deception and highlight seeking answers in the wrong places. Why would anyone seek the dead for guidance (as in a séance) instead of the living God? “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them” (Isa. 8:19-22). The Word of God is the only place that provides spiritual truth. It is the only objective standard we have against which to measure the teachings of anyone. Those who depart from it are already headed in the wrong way. Brethren must **know** the Word!

A seldom-mentioned event concerns Shebna, the treasurer, who encouraged Judah's alliance with Egypt. He ordered an expensive tomb for himself, but God had Shebna driven out of his office; Eliakim took his place as prime minister to King Hezekiah (22:15-24). How many preachers today are receiving more than adequate salaries and encouraging alliances that ought not to be made? It might be the case that our king, Jesus, would drive someone from his office due to the carelessness and complacency he displays. How sad that many are recommended alliances based on friendship and expediency!

God is with His people in times of distress to provide a refuge and ultimate justice (26). In fact, Isaiah 26:3 assures: "You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You*, Because he trusts in You." What a simple yet profound observation! Is it not the means by which Jesus could keep perfectly calm during the storm? Faith in God is the operative concept throughout the Bible. It is the basis of deliverance or peace through the trials to come, as shown by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Faith must remain firm and strong regardless of the consequences.

Those of Ephraim (Samaria, the northern kingdom) trusted in their economic prosperity and led a life of drunken excess (including the prophets and the priests). Isaiah warned them God would send Assyria to destroy their city because of their sin, but they laughed at His message that they would be taught by people of a strange language. Isaiah knew about their "covenant with death"—that they would not be harmed when the enemy came. He told them they had taken refuge in lies (28:1-15). How many people are taking refuge in lies today? The devil has sown them abundantly—from the New Age Church of Oprah to the false claims of Joseph Smith. Everywhere we turn we see the fabrication of lies being presented as truth. Even our children are taught the lie of evolution at a young age in school. Even worse is the fact that God's people take refuge in what they certainly know (or should know) are lies. They ignore truth and explanations—the facts. Whenever they are challenged, they dart back into their places of refuge—the comfortable deceptions they have constructed.

"Woe to Ariel!" God pronounces on the city of David (Jerusalem). *Ariel* means "hearth of God." God authorized their destruction and would bring enemies against them. The Jews were faithful about celebrating the feasts but did so superficially. They drew near to Him with

their mouths and honored Him with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. God wants sincerity rather than hypocrisy. They futilely thought that God did not see them. Who created whom? The people were filled with arrogance (29:1-24). Jesus had to call this attitude to attention in His day. Although it was expressed differently, the same hypocrisy was in evidence (Mat. 6:1-18; 15:1-9; 23:1-37). How many are worshipping today with those same attitudes? Should we not profit from the past?

Isaiah now encouraged God's faithful to be strong and patient, for the time would come when God's redeemed would be able to serve Him in joy and thanksgiving.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.... For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert.... A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.... They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isa. 35:1-10).

These wonderful descriptions refer to the time of Jesus. As beneficiaries of His teaching and the establishment of the church, we ought to be grateful everyday.

The futility and folly of idolatry is described in Isaiah 44. God declares unto His people that He is the only Creator (and thus the only one Who can help them). He is the first and the last—thus, the only God! There is no Rock like Him! By contrast the idols fashioned by the blacksmith and the craftsman have no strength. How foolish were those who worshiped a carved figure from a block of wood! A man would cut down a tree: half of it he burnt to warm himself, and with the other half he made an idol; then he fell down before it and said, “Deliver me, for you *are* my god” (44:9-17). One might as well appeal to any inanimate object for deliverance; again, only a *living* being can be of assistance.

God demonstrates His omniscience by the mention of the name of Cyrus 144 years in advance. He would capture Babylon by the power of God so Israel could be set free. Naming Cyrus proved Divine authority. God used Cyrus, as well, to subsidize Jerusalem's reconstruction and that of the temple. God has a purpose in all He does. He is not the author of chaos. He can do these things, again, because He is Creator and Almighty God. Those that worship idols gamble their destiny on a lie (45:1-25).

God did not refuse to bring salvation to His people because He did not hear their cries. His power never diminishes—their sins had sepa-

rated them from Him, and He refused to hear (59:1-2). These verses refute the theory of total depravity. We are not born separated from God; our own sins separate us. Their hands were defiled with blood, and their lips spoke lies. No one called for justice or pleaded for truth. They trusted in empty words. Their feet ran to evil, and they hastened to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are those of iniquity, and there is no justice in their ways. “For truth is fallen in the street.” God is dismayed because there is no justice (59:3-15). God would take vengeance on the ungodly but save those who turned from transgression. He speaks of a covenant with them—that His words would not depart from their mouth forever (59:16-22). How long will it be before man acknowledges that sin is the source of all our problems and miseries? God wants to bless us, but our sins keep getting in the way. If only we would forsake that which causes continual heartaches and trust in God instead, life would be better, and our future would be secure.

The Gospel age to come included Jesus preaching a transforming gospel (good tidings) to those who were suffering, poor, and broken-hearted. God would give them “beauty for ashes.” Gentile converts would double God’s glory. They would all be priests to the Lord. God uses the analogy of the bride and groom to express the joy and happiness over the new life they would experience. He also used the analogy of a budding tree of the garden in spring and the joy of new life it brings (61:1-11). In this new Zion, of which the Gentiles would be a part, a new name would be given to His people which God would give them. They would no longer be called Desolate and Forsaken but *Hephzibah* (“My delight is in her”) and *Beulah* (“married”). God would rejoice over them as a groom does his bride. They would be forever prosperous. Zion is told: “Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him” (62:1-12).

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is filled with statements that encourage God’s people to repent and return to Him, but it is somewhat surprising to read what the Lord says in Jeremiah 3:11-12: “Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.” Who is guiltier: the one who is punished for her sins by being taken captive or the one who sees these things occur and behaves the same way or even worse? Treacherous Judah observed her sister Israel put away for adultery and decided to play the harlot anyway (3:8). Hello!! Judah had even more evidence

than Israel of the fact that God punishes evil. Both had prophets to warn them, but Judah had the additional evidence of Israel's example, yet she ignored both the warnings and the example. God is exasperated with the nation. Jesus said a similar thing to Capernaum. He said she would be cast down to Hades, "for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Mat. 11:23). The people of Capernaum had even better evidence than those of Sodom; still they rejected Jesus. We have all the evidence that God recorded for us over the ages. We also have the completed revelation of God to us (2 Pet. 1:3). We are in the worst shape of all if we reject God.

The people had made their faces harder than rock against God's teaching (Jer. 5:3). Furthermore, they were not ashamed of their guilty actions—neither could they blush (6:15). "They were *like* well-fed lusty stallions; Every one neighed after his neighbor's wife" (5:8). They violated at least five of the Ten Commandments, as reported in Jeremiah 7:9. They were all covetous (6:13). They had become so accustomed to sin that they would not depart from it despite all the warnings. They seared their hearts and consciences (1 Tim. 4:2). How can anyone get into such bad shape? They denied the truth to themselves and others so often that they actually came to believe their own propaganda. Consider those today who once upheld the truth on the sanctity of marriage. Now that they are unscripturally divorced (and remarried), they have simply undergone spiritual plastic surgery. They have either removed Matthew 19:3-9 or had it reshaped so it is no longer recognizable. People, it turns out, have no qualms about violating God's laws and principles if it does not suit their purposes. No wonder Jeremiah records: "O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; *It is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). The remedy for all these sins was to "ask for the old paths, where the good way *is*, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls" (6:16). But they would not do so. Returning to God's Word is always the remedy for sin, but such is the last option that people are willing to take.

How bad were God's people? It is shocking to read God telling Jeremiah: "do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you" (7:16). There comes a time when people are beyond help. One of the Lord's apostles, inspired of the Holy Spirit, wrote that, when a brother sins a sin leading

to death, we do not need to pray for that sin (1 John 5:16). Most Bible students understand a “sin leading to death” to mean a sin concerning which a person refuses to repent. Judah refused to repent, and it would do no good at this time to pray for her. We ought to be sure that we have given up anything remotely sinful and that we are not captured by anything, whether it is covetousness, lust, causing discord, etc.

One of the saddest verses in the Bible is spoken by the people of God when they realize too late that the false prophets were wrong. No one is going to save the city or the temple from being destroyed; no one is going to prevent them from being taken captive. The sin, the pain, the humiliation has come upon them. “The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!” (Jer. 8:20). The false prophets had assured them that such a thing would never occur. They were convinced, by the very existence of the temple that they would be delivered from Babylon (7:4). The time for rescue was past; they had not been saved. Now they knew they had been lied to, but it was too late. There was no balm in Gilead (8:22) to heal their hurts or help them to recover. This captivity was something that would just have to be endured. How long will it take for people today to realize that they have been lied to by false denominational leaders who will not defend their own doctrine? How long will it take some brethren to realize that they have been lied to by those who operate Christian colleges and schools of preaching who will neither defend the truth nor their own actions?

After the final captivity in 586 B.C., two captains of the few armies that were left in the fields got word that Gedaliah had been made governor over all that remained in the land. Ishmael and Johanan came to him at Mizpah. Gedaliah told them, and swore with an oath, that they would be safe from the Chaldeans if they would dwell peacefully in the land. He advised them to gather wine and summer fruit and oil; they could dwell in their cities without fear. Jews who had fled to neighboring countries likewise felt safe in returning. They came back from Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other countries (2 Kin. 25:23-24; Jer. 40:7-12).

Although Johanan was agreeable with this arrangement, he found out that the king of Ammon had commissioned Ishmael to kill Gedaliah. For whatever reason, Gedaliah refused to believe there was any plot against him. Johanan even offered to secretly kill Ishmael, so the Jews would not end up in turmoil and be forced to leave their land.

Gedaliah, however, would not hear of such a charge, saying that Johanan was accusing Ishmael falsely. Ishmael and ten men went to Gedaliah at Mizpah; after they ate dinner, they arose and killed Gedaliah, along with the Chaldean soldiers and Jews who were present (2 Kin. 25:25; Jer. 40:13-41:3).

Why did Gedaliah refuse to be warned? Was he a perpetual optimist? If so, he paid dearly for such a philosophy. Perhaps he trusted in other sources of information. Whatever his rationale, there are many like him today; as brother Ira Y. Rice used to say: “You just can’t warn some brethren.” Theoretically, the thinking must be this: “If we pretend that a problem does not exist, then it does not exist.” All right; that attitude does not seem too shrewd, but some elders have bought it when warned about someone they were going to have for a meeting or a workshop. A similar mantra is chanted with regard to Dave Miller: “Oh, we talked to him, and everything is all right.” Really? One can envision the investigator of these matters calling up Dave to ask: “Is there anything to all of this opposition against you, Dave?” The answer, well-rehearsed by now, is offered, “Why, no. There is just a small toxic loyalty circle who are out to get me. Have you noticed all the good work Apologetics Press is doing? Have you read *Piloting the Straight*? My stand for the truth is unassailable.” For some, the response is probably, “Well, that’s what I thought. Thanks for clearing that up, Dave.” Perhaps someday brethren will learn that warnings are given for a reason—not because people are bored. Gedaliah was deprived of all the good he could have done because he failed to heed the warning.

After Gedaliah’s death, Johanan and all the people then approached Jeremiah and asked him to pray to God for them, so they might know what to do. They feared that, if they stayed in the land, they might be held accountable for Gedaliah’s death. Jeremiah agreed to do so and affirmed that he would tell them exactly what God told him; he would hold nothing back. They assured him that they would do what God said, whether they liked His solution to their problem or not. After ten days, God gave His answer; He told Jeremiah to tell Johanan and all the people to abide in the land. From this point on, God would build them up and no longer tear them down. God told them not to be afraid of the king of Babylon; He would save them and deliver them from his hand. **But**, if they ignored this counsel and went to Egypt, thinking that there would be plenty of food there and an absence of war,

then the sword that they feared would overtake them there—along with famine—and they would die there. Just as He had poured out His fury upon His people in Jerusalem, He would pour out His wrath upon them in Egypt. They would never again see their land. Furthermore, God accused them of being hypocrites in praying to Him because they already had made up their minds (42:1-22).

Johanah and others said to Jeremiah, “You speak falsely!” They claimed that God had not told him to tell the people *not* to go to Egypt. They accused his scribe Baruch of turning Jeremiah against the people so they too would be carried captive to Babylon. They all refused to obey the voice of the Lord. All of them departed for Egypt, and they forced Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them (2 Kin. 25:26; Jer. 43:1-7). This occasion serves as the epitome of those who ask preachers and godly elders what they should do—and after receiving wise counsel, they proceed to do what they had determined to do all along. The world does not lack self-willed individuals. No wonder Jesus gave as the first qualification for blessedness being “poor in spirit” (Mat. 5:3). The self-willed can neither be part of the kingdom nor be happy because they are determined to do things their own way rather than God’s way (Jer. 10:23).

Ezekiel

Ezekiel learned the rules early on in His ministry. God showed Him His glory at the very outset, and he no doubt needed to rely on that vision frequently. He was given a scroll to eat, and like all preachers, discovered that the truth was indeed sweet as honey. The visions of God’s glory and the honey were the “up” side. The “down” side is that the people would not listen to him. If people did not listen to Noah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, is it any wonder that faithful proclaimers of God’s Word today are ignored? Rejecting the message (or equating it to a pleasant song) is no excuse to get discouraged. At least faithful preachers deliver their own souls.

God instructed Ezekiel to do some dramatic preaching, lying on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40. He constructed a miniature battle site, and his food and drink rations were very low (Eze. 4:1-17). Later he had to use a sword to shave his head and beard (5:1-17). He could not speak for awhile (3), and when his wife died, he was not allowed to mourn (24). The prophet witnessed the corruption of the elders, the priests, and the women, and saw the glory of the Lord departing from Jerusalem

(8-11). It might be difficult to be enthusiastic about these messages, but Ezekiel always obeyed God—no matter what it cost him personally.

As today with televangelists, so in the prophet's day there were false prophets "speaking out of their own heart" (13:2). One might think that some of the false prophets might be trembling, since their prophecies of "no captivity" had failed, but they show their true colors by callously moving right on by spewing forth more gobbledygook. One of the characteristics of such men is that they are brazen to the max (as in Lucado). People had set up idols in their hearts, which is something we all ought to be warned against, since they might include entertainment, luxury, prosperity, and other ideals that we shoot for in America. We cannot allow ourselves to become distracted from the goals God has given us. When Nebuchadnezzar began his final assault on Jerusalem, God likened the city to a scummy pot, filled with filthiness (24:15-27). Such is the inevitable result of years of neglecting God's Word, delivered through His prophets.

Jehovah instructed Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. They were self-centered men, who took the best that there was for themselves. They ruled with force and harshness (or cruelty), reminiscent of the sons of Eli. They had allowed Israel to become diseased, sick, crippled, lost, and exploited by other nations (Babylon) (Jer. 50:6; Luke 15:4; 19:10). The Lord would hold them responsible. He was against the shepherds and would judge them according to the evil they had done (Eze. 34:1-10). From these verses we have an idea what God expects of shepherds or pastors over the church (also known as elders or bishops).

1. Shepherds must not to be concerned merely about themselves (3) (Acts 20:28).
2. Shepherds must feed the flock (2) (1 Pet. 5:2—KJV).
3. Shepherds must strengthen the weak (4) (1 The. 5:14).
4. Shepherds must be concerned for the spiritually sick (4) (Heb. 13:17).
5. Shepherds must bind up the spiritually broken (4) (1 The. 5:14).
6. Shepherds must bring back what was driven off (4) (Acts 20:29-31).
7. Shepherds must rescue those who have wandered astray (4) (Luke 15:4-7).
8. Shepherds must rule and lead in love and concern for the flock (4) (1 Pet. 5:3).

9. Shepherds must protect the flock (5) (Acts 20:29-31).

10. Shepherds must care enough about the flock to keep them together and united (6) (Eph. 4:11-13).

God said He would gather His sheep together once again and bring them back to their own land. He would feed them and protect them. He would also judge between sheep and sheep (Eze. 34:11-22). He would set one Shepherd over His sheep—His servant David (Jesus) Who would feed them and be their Shepherd (John 10:14-18). God's covenant of peace would remove all that was hurtful and provide "showers of blessings" upon His people. It would restore productivity and re-establish God's presence among them. They would become a garden of renown and be His flock (Eze. 34:23-31). Christians are indeed fortunate to be part of the one flock today.

Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the mountains of Israel that, though their enemies had temporarily conquered them and mocked Israel's name, they would not prevail. Jehovah was not pleased and would restore Israel as a nation to sanctify His own name. He foretold of Israel's prosperity and growth. God would give them new hearts and a renewed desire to obey His commands. He would bring them home and rebuild their ruins so everyone would know He was God (36:1-37). To illustrate their revival, God gave Ezekiel a vision of dry bones, strewn across a valley, coming to life. The scattered bones at God's command began to rattle and attach themselves together. Muscle and flesh covered those bones, and God's spirit breathed into them life, causing them to stand as a great army. All this symbolized the coming together of Israel as a nation again; the whole house of Israel would be united (37:1-14).

He further illustrated the coming together of the northern and southern kingdoms as one by joining two sticks together. One stick had the name of Judah upon it, and the other had Joseph (Ephraim or Israel). The two sticks would become one in the prophet's hand. The kingdom would no longer be divided, but some from the various nations would return and be one nation. Six specific blessings would result from this union: (1) They would all have one king—one who would be like David; (2) They would be purified from idolatry; (3) They would walk in His statutes and judgments; (4) God would give them a covenant of peace; (5) The temple would be set in their midst forevermore; (6) All nations would know Israel was sanctified by Jehovah God (37:15-28).

Ezekiel is told of an invasion of God's people in the distant future, long after they had resettled their lands in peace. Her neighboring foes had ceased to attack; then out of the blue, Gog of Magog organized greedy warriors to rain upon Israel like a storm cloud. Therefore, God could display a miraculous preservation of His people. He would bring upon these invaders an earthquake, internal strife, plagues, torrential rains, hail, fire, and brimstone. All the while, Israel would remain safe, and surely all would know that Jehovah God was the only true and living God. Gog's weapons would serve as fuel (firewood) for Israel for seven years. God would invite the birds and beasts to ravage and feast upon those bodies as a sacrificial meal. Likely, this description does not refer to one battle in particular but symbolizes God's protection over His people against all enemies (38:1-39:29).

Daniel

Since so much has already been covered from this book, only a few points will be listed, the first of which is that King Nebuchadnezzar found the advice of Daniel and his friends ten times better than all his magicians and astrologers. It is scarcely surprising that those who depend on God and His Word would have much more wisdom than those depending on superstition and ignorance. If our young people today knew the Word of God as they ought, they would be respected by their friends, and their counsel would be sought.

Daniel was humble and never sought to take credit for the mysteries he revealed to kings. He said that he did not have the power, "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets" (Dan. 2:28). God has chosen not to operate in this manner any more, but we believe in the same God Who has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). We can give others all the answers that God has given us.

Daniel described to Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom to come, which is the church. Not only were people looking for this kingdom, John the baptizer announced it (Mat. 3:2). Jesus also preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (4:17), and He sent His disciples out with this same message (10:7). Mark records that Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14). He later affirmed that there were those present who would not die until they had seen the kingdom of God come with power (9:1). This spiritual kingdom is the church, which began on the Day of Pentecost. This little stone grew and multiplied tremendously until it became the mountain that filled the whole earth (Acts 6:1, 7; 9:31; 12:24).

Those who believe in God and in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24), can repent of their sins (Luke 13:3), confess His Deity (Acts 8:37), and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (2:38). Those who gladly received this Word on Pentecost did so and were added to the church (2:41, 47), which Jesus built (Mat. 16:18) and shed His blood for (Acts 20:8). God then translates us out of the kingdom of darkness and puts us into His Son's kingdom (Col. 1:13-14).

Just as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were fearless, so was Daniel. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The ungodly have a reason to be fearful. When he saw the handwriting on the wall, Belshazzar's knees started knocking. The queen remembered that "the Spirit of the Holy God" was in Daniel, and he was summoned. Would that all Christians were known for possessing "the Spirit of the Holy God"!

CONCLUSION

The lives and messages of the major prophets are truly inspirational. The conditions of the world have not changed since these words were penned. The idols may take a little bit different shape than they did then, but people's rejection of God is quite similar. The church is not nearly in such bad shape as God's people were around the time of the captivity, but we are heading that direction. False teachers are leading the way with more heresies than ever before. We have, however, more reasons to be optimistic than Jeremiah and Ezekiel did. Isaiah lived through the spiritual high period of Hezekiah but died under the cruel reign of Manasseh, who ran as far as he could from the course his father set. Jeremiah likewise began at the high point of Josiah's restoration but saw things deteriorate spectacularly to the end of his life. Ezekiel witnessed the worst first and got to prophesy later of the good things to come. Daniel enjoyed a measure of respect his entire life. Regardless of the circumstances we face, we must have that same determination to be faithful in all things that these men had. Salvation belongs to the faithful.

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THE MAN: ISAIAH

Gene Hill

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Gene and Jerry obeyed the Gospel in 1975, at the old Andrews Avenue Church of Christ in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He began studying at the Florida School of Preaching beginning in 1976, and graduated in 1978. This was during the tenure of the late B. C. Carr as the school's Director. Gene began full-time preaching in 1982, serving congregations in Florida, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. He is currently working with the congregation in Indianola, Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

Just what was the office occupied by Isaiah, and what were his duties?

Naba signifies not only to *foretell future events*, but also to *pray and supplicate*; and *nabi*, the *prophet*, was by office not only a *declarer of events still future*, but the general *preacher* of the day; and as he frequently foresaw the approach of disastrous times, such was the wickedness of the people, he employed his time in counseling sinners to turn from the error of their ways, and in making strong prayer and supplication to God to avert the threatened judgments: for such predictions, however apparently *positive* in their *terms*, were generally *conditional*; strange as this may appear to some who, through their general ignorance of every thing but the peculiarities of their own creed, suppose that every occurrence is impelled by an *irresistible necessity* (Clarke 3).

As we consider this definition by Mr. Clarke, comparing it to what we read in the text of Isaiah's prophecy, we gain a greater appreciation for his work and the danger with which he was faced that resulted from Jehovah's Word. Judah's house was in danger of imminent destruction with the prophet as the watchman on the wall valiantly sounding out the danger approaching (Eze. 3:3-10, 17; 33:2-9).

We should read and heed this prophet's message as well as of that of the other prophets and consider our own situation today. The inclinations of humanity have not changed simply because we are in a more highly developed society. Society and culture today are afflicted and burdened with the same mind set as were those in Isaiah's time. Consequently, faithful Christians have the identical responsibility of

speaking forth the mind of God to a society that no more wants to hear it than did their brethren in Jerusalem and Judea.

With as much writing as been done on Isaiah, it is difficult to be overly original without attempting to present something novel just to give the appearance of new.

After having given considerable thought as to what my approach should be, I decided that, since Isaiah was a preacher, I would approach it from that vantage point. We can see the burden that a faithful preacher often carries (Isa. 6:9-13). From a personal perspective, preaching is one of the most frustrating and yet rewarding undertakings in which to engage. A prime motivating factor is in knowing that the outcome of sound preaching is eternal in effect. Come judgment day, we will truly see the structure that was built by the Lord working through the efforts of earthen vessels.

ISAIAH'S BIOGRAPHY

Let us make some observations regarding the preacher's biography (1:1). What does the name *Isaiah* mean? "The Hebrew name signifies *Salvation of Jahu* (a shortened form of *Jehovah*)" (Smith 267). In the definition regarding names, Smith has a section dealing with "*Names of places*" and states concerning them: "More commonly, however, such names were given to perpetuate the memory of some important historic occurrence" (431). Later in his definition of names, under the section, "*Names of persons*," he writes:

The majority of compound names have special religious or social significance, being compounded either (1) with terms denoting relationship, as *Abi* or *Ab*, *father as Abihud*... (2) nouns denoting natural life, as *am* "people" *melech*, "king" (432).

In the case of Isaiah, we have no record of his naming, but find that it is certainly prophetic in that the preachers message was indeed Jehovah's salvation. Consider also the meanings of the names given to his two sons: *Shearjashub* (7:3) "a remnant will return" (Strong's 111) (6:13; 10:21; 55:7; Rom. 9:27) and *Mahershalalhashbaz* (Isa. 8:3) "hasting (is he [the enemy] to the) booty, swift (to the) prey" (Strong's 62).

THE SON OF AMOZ (NOT AMOS)

There is conjecture that he was of royal descent being a brother of King Amaziah and therefore a cousin of King Uzziah. This would

make it easier for him to have access to any of the kings under which he lived and preached (Isa. 7:3) (Jensen 328) (37:21; 38:1; 39:3-4).

We know from the text that he had a family, having a wife (8:1) and two sons: Shearjashub (7:3) and Mahershalalhashbaz (8:3). He was a family man and would, therefore, have a more personal concern for society and culture. It would seem that knowing the situation and the hopelessness in it, he would be almost frantic in seeking to solve the situation of society.

Another clue to his standing and influence is his ability to have enough personal knowledge of the priests to know them by name and then to be able to trust their faithfulness to provide assistance in a task that could prove personally dangerous to all concerned (8:1-3; Ruth 4:2, 10-11; 2 Cor. 13:1). Prophets and preachers often face opposition that can be personally dangerous if not out right deadly (Jer. 37:16, 21; 38:6). A rabbinic tradition has Isaiah being placed in a hollow tree and being sawn asunder using a wooden saw (Robinson 1496). The reference to being “sawn asunder” in Hebrews 11:37 might refer to Isaiah’s death.

Isaiah also chronicled the reigns of Uzziah (2 Chr. 26:22) and Hezekiah (32:32).

ISAIAH THE PREACHER

Let us note the basic issues facing Judah with which the preacher had to deal and from which all else flows (Isa. 1:2-31). They were guilty of the grossest insensitivity towards Jehovah and were totally oblivious to the consequences of their choices (1:2-9). The prophet begins (1:2) by calling witnesses to his testimony, and Israel’s history was plain for all to see (Jos. 5:1; 7:5). This technique was a typical method of Jehovah in dealing with His people (Deu. 4:26; 30:19; 32:1; Psa. 50:4), for it would be most difficult to find a greater witness than creation itself (19:1; 97:6). His complaint dealt with the ungrateful behavior toward God and unfairness of Israel’s treatment of Him after all His care (Deu. 1:31; Eze. 16:6-14). This had been a consistent behavior on their part (Exo. 32:1-6; Deu. 9:16; Jud. 2:17). It should be noted that to rebel against God is nothing short of idolatry. Man worships nothing if he turns from God, for man still has an authority to which he resorts (Jer. 2:5-13; Gen. 3:1-6; Rom. 1:22-23). Any governing authority, other than God, is nothing more than idolatry. God illustrates where such turning can lead by comparing Judah to an ox and an ass, and that not

favorably to the ox and the ass. The people are portrayed as so debased and diseased as to be past feeling or even healing. They were guilty of a greater love for evil than of righteousness (Isa. 1:4-6; John 3:18-20). Isaiah admonishes them to simply look to the countryside round about them for evidence of His assertions, comparing their defenseless condition to an abandoned shack in a garden and that the only reason for their continued existence, was a faithful remnant (Isa. 1:7-9).

They were guilty of formalism in worship to God, not caring or realizing that one's view and practice of religion forms the totality of one's life, and then offers a solution: Hear the Lord. They were so debased that the only comparison suitable to their spiritual condition was that of Sodom and Gomorrah (1:10-15). They no longer worshiped God in spirit and in truth merely going through the motions (1:10-14). They were doing what they were doing for no other apparent reason, than that which is heard today: "We have always done it this way," "All my family is here," or "It was good enough for my (fill in the blank), so it is good enough for me." Pray tell how what the Israelites were doing is any different than what is being practiced today in any given worship assembly by those professing to be Christians. They no more considered being in the presence of Deity than most do today when they *worship*. The effect of such callousness is that God will not hear when they call, because their hands were covered in blood both literally and spiritually (1:15; 2 Kin. 17:1-17).

Genuine repentance is the only solution to the grossness and gravity of their self induced situation (Isa. 1:16-23). They had to accept responsibility for their actions and turn back to God. Their thinking must change (1:16-17; Rom 6:2). Judah must accept the fact that there are consequences to their actions and accept the correct course (Isa. 1:18-20). Isaiah tells them from whence they had fallen (1:21-23). God declares that the only course of action left to Him is vengeance in the purification and redemption process (1:24-31; 2 The. 1:6-10).

The prophet then details three future scenarios in regards to Zion, the first being Zion's coming glorification (Isa. 2:2-5). In spite of their egregious behavior and the coming vengeance of Jehovah (Exo. 34:10), there is a promise of a return to glory for the nation and the upholding of God's unfolding plan for man (Gal. 4:4) in the establishment of the Lord's government over His house and the resultant peace that would reign in that kingdom. Israel's participation would be conditioned upon

their response to Jehovah's gracious invitation to fellowship to walk with him (Rom. 11:26).

The second scenario involves Zion's persistent practice of idolatry and the degenerate social conditions that accompany such blasphemy (Isa. 2:6-4:1). Because they rejected God, He rejected them. Simply because one is not worshiping God does not imply one worships nothing. They did practice religion, but a false one (2:7-9; Psa. 81:8-16; Isa. 44:9-22). Through His judgment of their works and of the things in which they placed their trust, God will demonstrate His Divine Sovereignty by demolishing that in which they hoped (2:10-22). There would be no hiding from the wrath of Jehovah (2:10, 19, 21; Psa. 139:7; Jer. 23:23-24; Jon. 1:3, 10; Acts 5:9). They would bear the full brunt of what they had done, hopefully learning in the process that there are consequences to our actions (Gal. 6:7; Job 4:8; Pro. 1:31; 6:14; 11:18; Hos. 8:7; 10:12; Luke 16:25; Rom. 2:6-10).

Isaiah 3 details just how great the destruction will be. The native and natural leadership would be taken away (Isa. 3:1-3; 2 Kin. 24:14-16). If there were any left, they would be of such a nature or inclination as to worse than useless (Isa. 3:4-7). Their ruin would be so great that they would be prey to anyone desiring to make a prey of them. The true tragedy is that it is the fruit of their own choices and actions (3:8, 11-12), and that they persist in the practices that brought them to the current precipice upon which they now stand (3:9).

The Lord brings them into judgment and announces His charges against them (3:13-15). They abused their positions of leadership to engage in greediness, oppression, and had no pity on those who were their victims. Misusing their wealth and position, and following their false religion, they became decadent in their living (3:16-26; Rom 1:28-32). Thus it shall ever be when we individually and as a society and culture turn from a true view of Deity to one of our own making (Isa. 3:19-23).

The third picture is Zion's coming purification (Isa. 4:2-6). The contrast of the pure in this section is with that of the evil and impure of the previous section. Here the branch of the Lord is mentioned (4:2), sounding a lot like the growing Branch in Isaiah 11:1. Since the evil and impure have been taken away in God's fury (3:26; 4:4), those left will be the holy remnant. It will be as those "written among the living" which compares to those whose names are written in the book of life

(4:2-4; Exo. 32:32-33; Eze. 3:9; Luke 10:20; Phi. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). Jehovah will continue to provide protection for His people (Isa. 3:5-6; 1 Pet 1:1-5).

The prophet lays out the case against Judah (Isa. 5:1-30). Judah and Jerusalem are compared to a well-cared-for vineyard (5:1-7). Observe the great lengths that the vineyard owner went to ensure success in His venture (5:1-2). Jehovah provided Israel every possible blessing. He heard their cry in Egyptian slavery and saw that they were released (Exo. 1-14). He gave them a Law that was of a more excellent nature and quality than anything known by man (Rom. 2:18; 9:3-5; Deu. 4:7-8; Neh. 9:9-15). Because of God's care for them (Eze. 16:4), God expected more from Israel than He did from the rest of mankind. What were some of the sour grapes God found in His vineyard? Six woes are pronounced against Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 5:8-23).

1. Woe against **greed** (5:8-10). Being covetous was a direct transgression of the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20:17; Isa. 33:15; 57:17). They were completely intent to acquire as much as they could for the sake of the gain. Paul condemned some for being solely absorbed with gaining wealth for its own sake (1 Tim. 6:9-10). The rich farmer was condemned because he selfishly left out God and the poor (Luke 12:16-21). Being able to gain wealth is not condemned (1 Tim. 6:17-19; Ecc. 9:10; Eph. 6:5-8; 1 Cor. 10:31), but rather the inordinate desire and greedy hoarding of our production.
2. Woe against **dissipation** (Isa. 5:11-17). These people got up early to begin imbibing beverage alcohol sooner so they could stay drunk longer. Imbibing beverage alcohol is a sin condemned by Scripture and nowhere approved by anything contained therein. Willful engaging in such a terrible sin is responsible for the loss of great fortune, the debauching of our people, and the eternal loss of the soul. This writer is amazed at the bald-faced stupidity and complete nonsensical arguments by brethren that should know better when they argue that social drinking does not violate Scripture. We all agree that one drink is a sin—we just disagree which one. The Scriptures declare that it is the first one; they claim that it is the one that would make them *drunk*. The Scriptures teach that drunkenness is a matter of degree. Medical sci-

ence demonstrates that the first amount of beverage alcohol begins that process. Gluttonous wine bibbers shall be destroyed (5:13-17).

3. Woe against **defiance towards Jehovah** (Isa. 5:18-19). Here were a people whose consciences were so seared by sin and idolatry that they had no fear of the consequences of their words. They are pictured as a rope maker lengthening his rope by regularly adding more construction material (Clarke 45). The cords which they made were worthless or useless, serving no other purpose than their own destruction. Reconsider the picture of the condition of the Gentiles after their turning away from Jehovah, as recorded in Romans 1:19-32. They waxed worse and worse (2 Tim. 3:13). Such a mind-set is characteristic of the wicked (2 Pet. 2:10) and their foolish belief that they are right (Pro. 12:15). They were as those in the days of Noah doing business as usual (Jer. 17:15; Eze. 12:22, 27; Mat. 24:48), rejecting the pleas of Jehovah for their return. They did not learn a lesson from the destruction and carrying away of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kin. 15:29; 17:6; 18:11) and make a change in behavior.
4. Woe against **lax moral awareness** (Isa. 5:20). The people were so hardened in their heart and so besotted and taken with sinful activities, that they no longer even made an attempt to discern the difference between sin and righteousness. If there is no other example of the conscience being seared by sin, then this is certainly one (Rom. 1:28). It is as those spoken of by Peter (1 Pet. 4:3-4) who speak evil of those changing their lives. Such ones truly hate the light because their own deeds are evil (John 3:16-21; 7:7; 1 Kin. 22:8).
5. Woe against **self-conceit** (Isa. 5:21). Is not our own self defined goodness an easy target to hit? This sounds comparable to the admonition of Paul:

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12; 3:1; 5:12; Job 12:2; Pro. 25:27; 27:2; Luke 18:11; Rom. 15:18).

6. Woe against **dissipation and injustice among the elite** (Isa. 5:22-23). Once again the evil of imbibing beverage alcohol rears its ugly head. The Scriptures nowhere speak well of imbibing beverage alcohol (Pro. 23:30; 28:7; Dan. 5:1; Luke 15:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:13). The drunken state begins with the first sip with the imbiber being one sip drunken. That first sip **does** have a metabolic effect. These people were renowned solely for their drinking.

The debauched leadership was also exceedingly corrupt. Power over others carries an inherent responsibility to act in a righteous manner. It was and is sinful to show favoritism.

And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift **blindeth the wise**, and **perverteth the words of the righteous** (Exo. 23:8).

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; **because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes** (Amos 2:6).

For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: **they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right** (Amos 5:12; Deu. 16:18-19; 27:25; Isa. 1:23).

When the judicial system is corrupt, society at large has nowhere to go for justice and relief from the incursions of the unjust. The constitutional doctrine of Eminent Domain has been reinterpreted by the United States Supreme Court to allow the taking of private property for the use of other private parties for strictly non-governmental purposes. Congress to date has not taken strong enough action to defend society against the incursions of the United States Supreme Court. Why? If not for some form of financial remuneration, then it must be for the thrill that comes from wielding unopposed power. Faithful Gospel preachers should take note because there is coming a time, and is now upon us, that to preach forcefully against sin you will be charged with “hate crimes” because of your speech.

What does Isaiah say will be the result of such a gross turning away from the Law? Jehovah will use Assyria as punishment (Isa. 5:24-30). It will be totally devastating to Judah (5:24), and the revenge will be prolonged (5:25). Jehovah Himself will call the ones used to punish Judah (5:26-30).

There is a lesson here for us today. Why do we think that such Divine principles of righteousness applied back then to sin but somehow no longer do (Psa. 33:12; 144:15)? If God would punish such sins for

which He has accused them of being guilty, why should we feel immune from such consequences? The same thing that kept Judah safe will be the same thing that keeps us safe.

Happy *art* thou, O Israel: who *is* like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who *is* the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places (Deu. 33:29).

If judgment resides not at our door as a nation, it will not be as a result of our righteousness, but rather God's unending grace.

Someone in his audience may have raised a personal point of order to ask the prophet just who he thought he was to say such terrible things. Isaiah provides justification for his prophetic office in the relating of the vision of the Lord's glory while in the temple (Isa. 6:1-13).

Isaiah recounts the vision's details (6:1-4). In considering this section, I could not avoid considering Stephen's vision in Acts 7:55-56. With what each of these men was facing, they both needed the encouragement to be gained from an appearance of Deity to them. John tells us that Isaiah saw the Lord Jesus (John 12:37-41). John, in the same vein, saw a glorified Jesus on His throne (Rev. 4; 20:11-15; 22:1-5). Isaiah needed to know for Whom he was going to be doing the work assigned. Who really sits on the throne and rules from it? Jehovah!!

Note the glory briefly depicted in Isaiah 6:1. The Lord is still on His throne ruling and doing so regardless of the affairs of this plane of existence. He appears in the temple wherein He previously stated that He would so appear to His people (Exo. 25:17; 30:6; Lev. 1:1; 16:2; Num. 7:89; 17:4). We find the description of Isaiah 6:1 is in harmony with the Lord's previous manifestations in the tabernacle/temple (Lev. 16:2). The train or glory of the Lord filled the temple (Exo. 29:43; Lev. 16:2; Num. 9:15; 1 Kin. 8:10-11; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:2; Isa. 6:4; Hag. 2:7, 9; Rev. 15:8). The effect on the prophet is understandable and again consistent with previous literal appearances.

Observe the seraphim (heavenly beings) attending the throne.

They are described as having each of them three pairs of wings, with one of which they covered their faces (a token of humility); with the second they covered their feet (a token of respect); which with the third they flew (Smith 606).

According to Isaiah 6:6-7, they also carried out assigned tasks and were able to communicate. The chorus being sung by the seraphim

again are consistent with other such scenes depicted in Scripture (cf. Rev. 4:8-11). In speaking of Isaiah 6, Paul Butler writes:

The Lowliest Reverence becomes the Highest Created Beings (vs 2); The Heavenly Life is largely spent in active service (vs 2); The Celestial Intelligence have a keen appreciation of the Divine Holiness (vs 3); The Highest Intelligence see all things in their relation to God (vs 3) (128).

Jehovah receives such glory and reverence because it is justly and properly deserved as a result of what He has done (Gen. 1-11).

A very important part of this is Isaiah 6:4. The shaking of the posts of the door could indicate at least two things—the first being God’s displeasure with the use/abuse being made of His holy house (2 Kin. 16:10-16; 23:7; Eze. 23:36-39; 2 Kin. 21:4-9). The second thing indicated by the earthquake could be the coming change in law.

This violent concussion of the temple was an indication of God’s wrath and displeasure against the people for their sins; it was an earnest of the destruction of it and the city by the Babylonians first, and afterwards by the Romans; and it was designed to strike an awe upon us. Shall walls and posts tremble before God, and shall we not tremble? (Matthew Henry).

We should note that even Jehovah has a point of no return when, upon reaching it, His judgment will be a flood upon the recipients of such wrath (Num. 25:1-5; Jos. 7:1-4; 1 Kin. 14:7-16). The discussion is that judgement awaits those that turn from Jehovah to their own whims. The Lord has not abandoned them, rather it is they who have abandoned him (Isa. 59:1-2). It must be noted that simply because God has changed the Law which governs mankind, the principles behind the Law remain the same (Heb. 12:18-29). The doorposts of the Temple were shaken, but we now have a Holy Edifice that will never be destroyed. If the Jews hear and obey the New Law of the Gospel, they will once again be engrafted to the tree and once again live (John 15:1-8; Rom. 11:1-36).

Then there is Isaiah’s reaction to seeing the glory of Jehovah (6:5). When a sinful man stands in the presence of a Holy God, he sees himself as he truly is (Dan. 10:5-9; Hab. 3:3-19). Even in Isaiah’s own eyes his lips were unclean, he could not join in the chorus of praise with the seraphim. He recognized the fact that sin cannot be abided by a Holy God (Hab. 1:13; Psa. 5:4). Before forgiveness is given and righteousness imputed, man must realize his practices as sinful (Eph. 2:1-3; Col.

3:5-7). The only solution for sin is forgiveness from God (Job 7:21; Psa. 32:1; 130:3-4), which also gives Isaiah authority to act—as a sinner forgiven and called by God to His holy work.

Then we observe the response of a seraphim (Isa. 6:6-7). Sin is pictured as being purged by fire (4:4; 9:5; Eze. 22:18-22; Mal. 3:2; 4:1; Mat. 3:11-12; John 16:8-11). Thus, the seraphim brings a living coal from off the altar ignited by God (Lev. 9:24; 2 Chr. 7:1, 3), purifying the sins from the prophet.

Upon being purified, there is the call and charge of Jehovah to Isaiah (6:8-13). There is the Divine invitation and the prophet's acceptance (6:8). A great lesson to learn from this is that God asks for and invites service to Him in His Cause. Jesus invites all to come to Him (Mat. 11:28-30; Rev. 3:20; Song of Sol. 5:2-4; Luke 12:36). Today, Jesus continues to call and seek those that will purify themselves through repentance and obedience (2 The. 2:13-14). We should learn from the prophet's willingness to serve without placing any conditions upon his service. Just as Isaiah did not hesitate we too ought to eagerly respond to the call (Acts 2:41).

Isaiah received what appears on the face of it to be an impossible task. He was charged with telling the people what they least wanted to hear—the truth of coming judgment (Isa. 6:9-10). The people's continual refusal to hear and acknowledge the truth—and then to respond appropriately—is best seen in a passage from Jeremiah (Jer. 6:16; 42:1-22). When people do not want to do something, they just will not, regardless of the proof offered. Consider the example of Pharaoh at the preaching of Moses (Exo. 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32). He refused to hearken, no matter the proof. Why should the idolatrous and rebellious heart of Israelites react any different than the heart of an idolatrous and rebellious Gentile? As long as a heart insists on continuing in a worldly course, it will not respond to spiritual truth in spite of standing in the smoking ruin of their own society (Rom. 8:1-8).

Or the words may be understood thus, according to the Hebrew idiom: "Ye certainly hear, but do not understand; ye certainly see, but do not acknowledge." Seeing this is the case, make the heart of this people fat—declare it to be stupid and senseless; and remove from them the means of salvation, which they have so long abused (Clarke 50).

This same thought was spoken about the Jews in the days of Jesus (Mat. 13:14-15) and Paul (Acts 28:26-27). It could well be suggested that nothing much has changed in the hearts of mankind today.

The prophet learns the heart breaking length of his assigned tour of preaching, the duration of the charge, and its ultimate result (Isa. 6:11-13). Jehovah has just told him of the futility of his assignment, and this patriotic prophet forlornly asks how much time is left to him. How does the preacher determine when his time is up? It requires a judicious amount of righteous judgment (John 7:24). It also requires a certain realism concerning the circumstances in which one finds oneself (Mat. 7:6). The preacher must discern the spiritual fruit before him (vv. 16-17, 20) and then act accordingly.

The Lord, however, offers hope in the face of the prophet's plea. There will be a remnant left to carry on the plan of Jehovah, even though it is only a tenth. God uses the insignificant in man's estimation to accomplish His ends (Mat. 7:13-14; Luke 8:11-15; 13:18-21).

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A VIEW TOWARD PENTECOST

ISAIAH 2:2-4

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We have always appreciated so much the prophets—whether Major or Minor. The only difference in the two is that one wrote more than the other. Our study involves the Major Prophets; therefore we are studying those who wrote more. What one prophet wrote is no more important than what another wrote. One misconception that exists is that a prophet was one who only spoke of the future. This is a critical and severe error. The prophets were spokesmen for God and wrote more for their present day than of future events, some of which are found in fulfillment in the New Testament. Our study for this chapter comes from Isaiah as he, by Inspiration, spoke of a day—a special day in every way that would come to pass. He said:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (2:2-3).

Before getting into the details of the above passages we would like to point out, as most are aware, that this is a reference to Acts 2. Throughout many long years, we have heard Acts referred to as the “Hub of The Bible.” Once upon a time we thought that this might give emphasis to this chapter alone to make it appear that it was more important than any

other chapter. While this is most certainly not the case, Acts 2 is important for a number of reasons, and *hub* is not a bad analogy. If one looks at a wagon wheel, he will notice that in the center of the wheel is a hub. There are a number of spokes pointing outward to the tire that wraps itself around the hub to form the wheel. Acts is called the *hub* because so much of that which we speak of in this lectureship points toward this marvelous book. After Acts 2 the spokes of the wheel point back to the *hub* making the wheel complete and signifies that the rest of the New Testament points backward as surely as the Old Testament points forward both to Acts. We are not suggesting that it is more important than other passages but simply underscoring its importance. Events before looked forward to the Day of Pentecost. Events afterward pointed back, in many cases, to the Day of Pentecost.

Let us study this day. We believe that many times we have missed the significance of this day in a general way. We will gain more appreciation of Pentecost and what it means as well as why this chapter is often called the “Hub of the Bible.”

I once heard a story that was told regarding a preacher of old that was preaching on the establishment of the church. Throughout his lesson, he emphasized over and over the Day of Pentecost. He gave numerous passages to corroborate his sermon. He told of the church being established. He told of the power coming on the apostles. He explained the last days. He spoke of cloven tongues of fire setting upon each of the apostles and every sentence ended with “On the Day of Pentecost.” One gentleman who was obviously a visitor walked by the preacher after the sermon was completed. He told the preacher that you have convinced me that the church was established on Pentecost. I have only one question, what is Pentecost? How easy it is for us to have the notion that everyone is as familiar with that day as true Christians are. We do not always take time to teach people regarding the Day of Pentecost.

We begin in Isaiah 2:2-3 already given in this discussion. There are four things in these passages that stand out regarding our subject. The first thing is that the events recorded there would come to pass in “the last days.” It also involves the “house of the Lord.” Then “all nations shall flow unto it,” and the “Word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem.” These facts form the basis of what is prophesied here in Isaiah.

We would like to use another passage to further our study.

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

We want our readers to look at the similarity between Luke 24 and Isaiah 2. There is one of our terms that we identified earlier, and that is “all nations.” The next thing in Luke 24 is that the beginning would be at Jerusalem. Notice the first part of Luke 24:46 where Jesus said, “Thus it is written.” If you will look in some commentaries you will see that there is some doubt as to where this is written. There is no doubt in our eyes that Jesus has reference to Isaiah 2.

Jesus further proclaimed, “And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:48-49). Jesus, in essence, is saying, “Do not leave Jerusalem. I want you to be in Jerusalem. There is a reason for you to be in Jerusalem because we are dealing with the prophecy of Isaiah.” He knew that Isaiah had said: “for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Zion and Jerusalem are one and the same thing. Zion was used most of the time when some spiritual significance was involved, but for all intents and purposes Zion and Jerusalem are the same place. Any other city would have broken the prophecy and the Word of our Lord, therefore, just any old city will not do. The Scriptures are specific. Isaiah said that the Word would go forth from Jerusalem.

Let us look at some passages in Acts 1. Luke records the following:

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me (Acts 1:1-4).

The Lord by now had been resurrected. They had seen Him alive. He was with them forty days after His resurrection. He spoke things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, and they were commanded not to

depart from Jerusalem. Look how all of this comes together. Isaiah said that the Word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem. In Luke 24:46-49 the apostles were commanded to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. Isaiah 2 is about seven hundred years before Pentecost. Luke 24 is fifty days before Pentecost. Acts 1 is ten days before Pentecost and every one of these says Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. All of these are leading us up to the Day of Pentecost.

Open your New Testaments to Acts 2.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (2:1-4).

Here then is the place that the apostles were told to remain until this day and the power came. It is interesting to look at a footnote in the American Standard Version. While I use exclusively the King James Version, this footnote is interesting. It says, "When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled." Is that not interesting? The idea of it being fulfilled is suggestive of the fact that this was something that was the subject of prophecy. We suggest to you that it was the prophecy given in Isaiah 2 that was being fulfilled. This is what is suggested in Luke 24:46, Acts 1:1-4, and especially in Acts 2. This was the day that Isaiah looked forward to. It was the day that the Lord told His disciples to not leave Jerusalem and that they would be endued with power from on high.

Notice, then, that Isaiah said that these things would come to pass in the "last days," and he said this seven hundred years before their occurrence. We are sure that everyone is familiar with the sermon that Peter preached in Acts 2. Our minds go forward to Acts 2:16-17.

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Good people, we do not get many "this is that" fulfillment of prophecies in the Scriptures. This, then, leaves no doubt in our minds as to what the prophets said about this day. Joel speaks of

these matters and Peter leaves no doubt as to what he is talking about. Joel's prophecy and Isaiah's prophecies are two different prophecies, but they both use this same phrase *in the last days*. There can be no doubt in the minds of sincere students regarding these matters. Where are you, Peter? Jerusalem! What day is it, Peter? Pentecost! What day are you talking about? The last days! This is a reference to the last period of time—the days in which we now are living, or the final dispensation.

Isaiah said that all nations would flow unto it. This coincides with Luke 24 as well as Mark 16:15-16, and it differs from what we call the "Limited Commission" given in Matthew 10 where the disciples were told to go to only the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This Word that would go forth from Jerusalem was for all nations. It was not and is not a national Gospel for America, but an international Gospel—that is for the whole world. It is significant that in Acts 2:5 the Scripture reveals to us something about the audience on that Pentecost Day. "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." Every nation or all nations cannot be overlooked. One of our friends says, "You cannot get any aller than all." Surely this is a play on words, but this is specifically what Isaiah was talking about, as well as almost the same quote in Malachi 4:1.

What do we have here? We have all nations. We have the last days. The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains. In 1 Timothy 3:15 we have the house identified. "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." We are left with no doubt what the house of the Lord is—that which both Isaiah and Paul were talking about. Putting this together: we have the last days with all nations included in these days. We also have the mountain of the Lord's house which will be established, and Paul identifies the house as the church (1 Tim. 3:15). What do we find in Acts 2? We have the New Testament church coming into existence.

We used to have discussions with denominational preachers about the establishment of the Lord's church and when it came into existence. Some of them argued that the church came into existence during the ministry of the Lord. Jesus said that He would build His church (Mat. 16:18). He said that some of those living would not be dead when the kingdom would come (Mark 9:1). In Acts 1-2 all of this comes together exactly as Isaiah said it would happen on the Day of Pentecost. But, we have not as yet come to our subject. We have been able to some degree to show what occurred on Pentecost.

WHAT IS PENTECOST?

Pentecost is a term that we hear all the time. The word is almost over-used—particularly if you put it in the adjective form—Pentecostal. We have the Pentecostal Gospel, the Pentecostal Church, Pentecostal tongues, Pentecostal fires, Pentecostal baptism, Pentecostal outpouring, Pentecostal hymns, and there is a Pentecostal Hymnal, which is interesting for we have no record of those singing in Acts 2. As a youth, we thought we would study this word. We had an old concordance and looked up the word, and to our surprise the word is found only three times in the New Testament. Why, we thought as much as the word is used today that it must be on every other page in the Bible. It is used in Acts 2:1, Acts 20:16, and 1 Corinthians 16:8. When you have read these verses, you have read every verse in the Bible that uses the word. One can imagine our surprise! We know that many things happened on the day of Pentecost.

We begin to realize that Pentecost was a Jewish feast day. It did not start in Acts 2. It has been described by preachers as the first Pentecost following the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why would it be defined that way? The Jews had been under this feast day for fifteen hundred years. Since it is a Jewish feast day, one would think that he could go back into the Old Testament and find the word *Pentecost*. However, the word is not found anywhere in the Old Testament, and the reason is that it comes from a Greek word: *Pentecoste*.

Some Greek words are translated while some few are transliterated; which means that some Greek words were given an English spelling. *Baptism* is one of those words; it means "immersion," yet it was not allowed to be defined. We can understand why this happened because the

translators were members of churches that did not believe in immersion. One could make an argument that some of them at least wanted to couch or hide the real meaning of baptism. Some of them believed in sprinkling for baptism; so they anglicized the Greek word. The same is true of *Pentecost*. All you have to do with the Anglicized word *Pentecoste* is drop the “e” and you have our English word *Pentecost*. The word means “fifty” or “fiftieth,” and while you find it in the Old Testament, it simply was not called Pentecost.

Leviticus 23 gives us some of the feasts in the Old Testament. Actually, there were only three feast days in which all male Jews were commanded to commemorate these days in Jerusalem (Exo. 23:14, 17). In Leviticus 23:15-16 we note:

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.

These verses are a reference to the day following the Sabbath of Passover week or the first day of the week. Passover was the first month of the Jewish calendar. It did not begin on a certain day every year, instead it began on the evening of the 14th day of the month. I was born on the 4th day of the month, but that day has been on every day of the week. Pogo, the cartoon character, once said, “Friday the 13th fell on Wednesday this time.” Of course, it was not really Friday, but this conveys the thought that we are trying to articulate. While this is true of the Passover, Pentecost always fell on the same day, the first day of the week with the count beginning on the first day after the Passover Sabbath. Regardless of when the Passover began, it had seven days and thus a Sabbath.

Leviticus 23:15 said to begin the count on the morrow after the Sabbath. The count was to start on the first day of the week. Some detail and explanation is here given by Moses in Leviticus 23:15. He said to count “from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering.” The sheaf of the wave offering was the green stalk of barley with the green grains intact and was the promise or pledge of the harvest to come. It was almost like a covenant that was related to the harvest. The sheaf was waved before the people on the morrow after the Sabbath. The wave offering was made on the first day of the week. They were to count seven Sabbaths and the morrow after the seventh Sabbath was

the fiftieth day or Pentecost. *Pente* means fifty. This was a specific day. It could not be the Sabbath, a Monday, Tuesday, or any other day. It was the “morrow” after the seventh Sabbath. Seven times seven is forty-nine and the next day was the fiftieth day. It was always supposed to be this way and this day. On this fiftieth day they were to bring a meal offering which consisted of the flour that came from the grain that was now harvested. It was also called the feast of harvest, feast of weeks, and feast of ingathering in Exodus 34:22. It is easy to see the connection, if one will look carefully. The meal offering has a beautiful significance since it was a fulfillment of the pledge or wave offering that was made on the day after the Passover Sabbath had ended.

What is the resurrection of Christ called? In 1 Corinthians 15:20 it is called the first fruits. This would equal the wave offering—the pledge of our own resurrection. When was the feast of Pentecost? On the fiftieth day, so we can see why it is called *Pentecoste* or fiftieth day, which fell on the first day of the week. Luke gives one of the clearest passages in the New Testament that shows the day in which Christ arose.

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:1-3).

There are other Scriptures here in Luke 24 that makes it unmistakably clear; so Sabbath-day believers cannot get the resurrection on the Sabbath day. “Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (24:7). Then he adds: “And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs” (24:13) We know which day it was because of verse one. We know that it was the first day of the week. Verse 21 says, “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.” Verse 1 says that Jesus would arise the third day, and verse 21 has certain ones talking with the resurrected Lord on the third day as clearly specified in these and other Scriptures. The last part of Luke 24, when Jesus told the apostles not to leave Jerusalem, was the first day of the week or resurrection Sunday, if you will.

Pentecost was the first day of the week, which was the day Jesus was raised. The Lord’s church had its beginning on the first day of the

week, therefore Pentecost was a marvelous day. Think about this! From the resurrection to Pentecost was fifty days. From the first Passover which was celebrated in Egypt to the giving of the Law of Moses was how long? We are not expressly told. However, if one looks at Exodus 19:1, he will find a time frame. "In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai." They came to Mount Sinai in the third month. Jews (any Jewish encyclopedia records this) celebrated Pentecost as a commemoration of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. My conviction is that it was fifty days from the first Passover in Egypt to the giving of the Law. It was also fifty days from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to Pentecost from whence the law went forth from Jerusalem and the Word of the Lord from Zion.

In Exodus 32, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, some of the people had turned to idolatry. Moses called the Levites out and the Scriptures reveals: "And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (32:28). When the first Gospel sermon was preached, how many were added? Three thousand! What a tremendous and wonderful day was the day of Pentecost.

WORK CITED

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

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

ISAIAH 7:14

Daniel Denham

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INTRODUCTION

That Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin in Bethlehem is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion. It is a crucial item in the development and unfolding of the Scheme of Redemption. The fact of its occurrence has direct bearing on the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. One cannot consistently affirm to be a believer in the Bible as God's *breathed out* Book and yet deny the Bible doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

The central text to that teaching is Isaiah 7:14, in which the prophet Isaiah declares by inspiration: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." While it is not within the immediate province of this chapter to discuss the inspiration of the Bible and its attendant matters, it does behoove us to stress that these things are key to the study of the Virgin Birth. If God exists, if the Bible is His verbally, plenary inspired and thus inerrant Word, and if it teaches the fact of the Virgin Birth of Christ, then it must be the case the Virgin Birth doctrine is true! It is the third proposition of this hypothetical statement—namely, the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ—with which we are concerned in this study.

In the nineteenth century there arose a popular movement in theological and philosophical circles to "demythologize" the Bible, as Rudolph Bultmann the most influential of those promoting the notion

termed it. Despite the many diverse disciplines involved in this effort, the advocates of this so-called “higher view” of interpretation were united in one basic tenet: The doctrine of anti-supernaturalism, or the view that the miracles of the Bible never happened. The implication of this premise is significant. If miracles have never happened, which the Bible affirms otherwise, then the Bible is errant in its teaching. It then could not be strictly considered as verbally and plenary inspired of God. There is, of course, the underlying predisposition to infidelity involved in the effort to demythologize the Bible, which is to remove the miraculous element in its history and subsequently even its origin. Ostensibly, the effort is to arrive at “the essential message of the Bible,” which is really a watered-down form of religious humanism. The modernist and his successor in this effort, the post-modernist, deny the fact of the Virgin Birth. In so doing, they often resort to messing with the text itself, and this is especially true in their handling of Isaiah 7:14.

What does the testimony of Sacred Writ actually set forth concerning the Virgin Birth for which many mothers, especially those of the ancient Hebrew nation, did wait and yearn, of which priests did minister, and prophets frequently spoke and inquired. “To the law and to the testimony” (Isa. 8:20) is our plea and planned course of study.

A CLARIFICATION ON THE MEANING OF VIRGIN BIRTH

First, in the study of the Virgin Birth, we must clarify the meaning of the phrase as applied to Jesus of Nazareth. By it we do not have reference to the delivery of the baby Jesus to Mary in the manger of Bethlehem. On the contrary, in this regard the birth of Jesus itself was like unto all other deliveries before or since. The birth in this respect was natural.

The expression, as it contemplates the miraculous aspect of that birth and which separates the birth of the only begotten Son of God from that of everyone else, refers to the conception which is antecedent to the delivery! What made Jesus’ birth special and extraordinary is the fact that He was conceived in the womb of His mother Mary without (in the absence of) the agency of a man! The natural provisions of procreation were set aside (Scroggie 512) to accomplish a purpose which otherwise could not have been done, namely the bringing about of the bodily incarnation of Deity in the flesh of humanity. This in such a fashion that the incarnate One would be both fully Divine and fully hu-

man. By this I intend that Jesus of Nazareth possessed by virtue of the Incarnation all of the essential attributes involved in Deity and those involved in humanity. The Incarnation's realization was contingent upon the miraculous, super-natural intervention of God. It is this degree of intervention in the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary that makes His birth unique from any other birth. It is also the reason why He is specifically called the "only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Some would define *monogenes* as "unique" or "only," but that does not go nearly far enough in reflecting the force of the Greek term, especially as involved contextually in the essential identity of Jesus Christ. The word is a compound word (*mono + genes*) and properly ought to be rendered as the King James Version does ("only-begotten").

The inspired Record says that the angel Gabriel appeared unto a certain woman: "a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1:26-27). Luke is specific as to where this occurred—in Nazareth of Galilee, and as to when it occurred—in the days of Herod the Great, even in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Mary's cousin Elizabeth, a "daughter of Aaron." The detail has all the earmarks of a careful and subsequently reliable historical source. It is strikingly calm and unpretentious, and not filled with the fanciful fables of the contemporary pagan world with their often grotesque or ecstatic embellishments. The angel said unto Mary: "Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women" (1:28). When she saw him and heard these remarkable words, she was greatly troubled and "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be" (1:29). The angel then added:

Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (1:30-33).

But this was cause for further puzzlement on the part of Mary, who then inquired: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (1:34). *Know* is used in the sense of "have sexual relations or intercourse with," or as Thayer says: "of the carnal connection of male and female" (117), as in Genesis 4:1; et al. The force of the question is: "How am I, a virgin—one who knows no man, one who has not had intercourse

with any man, how am I to be found with child?" As Rex A. Turner, Sr., noted: "Her very question denotes that she was a virgin" (166).¹ As Turner also observed, the answer given by the angel confirmed that fact as well. He answered: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

The child would be conceived (begotten) in her womb by the power of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit! Thus, Matthew said by inspiration that Mary later "was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Mat. 1:18) and "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (1:20). He also declared this to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. He quoted it thus: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Mat. 1:22-23). We are told that her espoused Joseph: "knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS" (1:25). They thus abstained from sexual relations until after the birth of Jesus.

Now, the testimony of Luke and Matthew is quite lucid. The child was conceived, begotten of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit who over-shadowed a virgin, Mary by name, who had no sexual relations with any man until after Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. She was a virgin in the full and proper sense of the word when she conceived Jesus and remained such until after His birth!

THE CONCURRENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES ELSEWHERE

Now let us turn our attention to a variety of passages all bearing directly or indirectly upon the proposition that Jesus Christ was or would be conceived in the womb of a virgin. These passages support the testimony of Matthew and Luke.

1. In Genesis 3 Moses, the man of God, described the temptation of Mother Eve and the subsequent Fall of Man. He set forth the decreed consequences of this initial, volitional plunge into sin. He also recorded the first Messianic promise. In speaking unto the serpent who had beguiled Eve, God declared, according to the inspired Record: "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).

We note the singular number of *seed*. With particular reference to Genesis 22:18, Paul affirmed quite forcefully that this term applied to Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). As the Abrahamic promise is but an enlargement on the initial “seed” promise made in Genesis 3:15 in the progression of revelation, the point of Galatians 3:16 is equally valid here—that Jesus is the proffered “seed” of the woman.

It is a scientific fact that there exists a seed of women. It is called the female gamete or egg. Its fertilization by the male gamete or sperm constitutes conception. The fertilized egg then attaches itself to the uterine wall. With these steps a human being embarks into life under the normal procedures of natural procreation.

The reference then to the seed of the woman constitutes a case of scientific foreknowledge on the part of the Scriptures, as until quite recently it was believed that the woman’s part in the process was simply to provide an incubator (the womb or uterus) for the male gamete. Not only this, it is a clear allusion to a quite remarkable event—one which would involve the female but exclude the agency of the male. The omission of the male in the text is significant, to say the least!

The subsequent *seed* would bruise the head of the serpent (or Satan) which reflects a mortal wound, a critical blow, from whence the serpent could not recover, while the serpent would bruise the heel of the promised *seed*, representing then a comparatively minor wound (Turner 167). Ultimately, this *seed* would be victorious over the devices, artifices, and stratagems of the Devil. Though slain by wicked hands for the sins of men, the resurrected, ascended, and reigning Messiah would effect the downfall of Satan’s domain and dominion of sin.

Adam anticipated the significance of the promise in some measure, when he called the woman *Eve*, for she was the mother “of all living” (Gen. 3:20). It was also in view of this promise that the first temporal covering for sin was made by means of the blood of animals (3:21). Also, when Cain was brought forth into the world, Eve captured its significance as she proclaimed: “I have gotten a man from the LORD” (4:1). Ritual sacrifice for sin was also instituted in the shadow of that promise (4:3ff). With all of these close textual connections, it is quite evident that a Messianic application or connection of the promise is in view, and, as Prof. Everest stated: “There is something peculiar and supernatural in the phrase, the ‘seed of the woman’” (309).

2. Jeremiah also prophesied of the Virgin Birth of Christ. He declared of old: “How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22). The use of the perfectum propheticum in the prophecy foreshadows of the assurance of what would happen as if it in reality already had, for so sure was its fulfillment that in the very Mind of God, who sees the end with the beginning, it already had!

The context of Jeremiah 31 is clearly Messianic in nature. Note especially verses 1, 6, 15, 31-35, the latter of which are expressly quoted by the Hebrews writer as applying the New Testament of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 8:8-13). Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jeremiah 31:22 declared that a “new thing” had been created by Jehovah—“a woman shall encompass a man!”

Of this text Rex Turner has noted:

If by this statement is meant that a woman would enfold or embrace a man in her arms, what would be new about that? How have men been led to the altar, anyway? If by the statement is meant that a woman would house a male child in her womb, what is new about that? How do men have their entrance into the world, except by an exodus from the womb? If by the statement is meant that a woman would house in her womb a male child without having had the agency of a male, that would be new! Thus Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding the “new thing in the earth” is a corroboration of Jehovah’s pronouncement to Satan that the seed of woman—the seed that would come by woman alone—would bruise his [Satan’s] head (168).

What indeed would be new about a woman hugging a man? Or giving birth as per the natural laws of procreation? Clearly, there is a miraculous fulfillment intended for Jeremiah’s wondrous words!

3. Another text bearing upon this subject is Matthew 22:41-46, wherein the Lord raised the questions: “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?” The Virgin Birth gives the answer! How could He be both David’s son and yet David’s Lord? The Virgin Birth of Christ informs us as to how He could be. Also how could He be both God and man, *ho theos-anthropos* (the God-man)? The Virgin Birth provides the means.

4. Mark 1:1 also hints at the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, when it states: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It thus presupposes the fact of the Incarnation, which was made possible through and thus presupposes the fact of the Virgin Birth.

5. John 1:14 does likewise when it records that “the Word [Jesus Christ] was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Having existed before

the very beginning of the world (John 1:1-3), He now tabernacled in human flesh! The Virgin Birth tells us how this was accomplished. In fact, the corpus of the writings of John is apologetic in nature in stressing the Deity of Jesus Christ in contrast with His obvious humanity. Who can logically accept the fact of the Incarnation but reject the very means of it (cf. 2 John 7)?

6. Paul, in like manner, accepted the certainty of the Virgin Birth as demonstrated by his discussion of the humility of Christ, “who emptied” Himself and “took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phi. 2:7; cf. Col. 2:9). The Virgin Birth tells us both how and when this came to pass.

7. In Romans 1:3-4 Paul declared that though Jesus was “born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (ASV), He was “declared with power” to be the Son of God by virtue of His Resurrection. However, how could He “be” the Son of God incarnate in the flesh without the fact of the Virgin Birth?

8. Paul in Galatians 4:4-5, forcefully proclaimed about the same time as the penning of his epistle to the Romans that, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” James Orr has rightfully noted that *made* (in some versions *born*) in “born of a woman” most properly denotes the idea of *became* (Gr. *geuneetos*), and presupposes the pre-existence of Christ prior to His physical birth. Thus, Orr concluded: “In such a connection, it may be felt the expression, ‘born of a woman,’ derives a new significance” (118-19). Orr, commenting on the evidence derived from these texts, and especially Galatians 4:4, as well as the preponderance of the testimony from the apostles, noted later:

How, then, was this entrance into humanity accomplished? Was it *docetically*—in mere seeming? Assuredly not, in the view of these Apostles. It was a *true* humanity which Christ assumed. He came truly in the flesh. There was a true entrance into human life by a birth. But such a birth, in the nature of the case, was a miracle. What was the nature of the miracle? Do not the narratives of the Virgin Birth supply the answer? (211).

9. First Timothy 3:16 also shows Paul’s faith in the Virgin Birth by his declaration: “God was manifest in the flesh.” The thought is that Deity was revealed, made known, and thus brought before the eyes of men in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. His wondrous character, His

mighty works, and His powerful words all testified of the same. The Virgin Birth was essential to this manifestation.

10. The writer of Hebrews also endorsed the fact of the Virgin Birth in writing: "Wherefore when he [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body [His physical body] hast thou prepared me" (Heb. 10:5). It is a quotation of a prophecy made by David concerning the Messiah (Psa. 40:6). A clear implication of the prophecy is that He thus existed prior to His physical body. The Virgin Birth provides the means through which He came into the world and took upon Himself the robe of flesh.

11. The apostle Peter as well lends his support in proclaiming: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:3). Observe his affirmation that God is the Father of Jesus Christ!

12. In Revelation, repeatedly, Jesus' lineage as David's progeny and as God's Son is asserted in these dual forms side by side (Rev. 1:5-8; 2:18; 3:7, 20-21; 5:5-12; 17:14; 19:16; 21:22; 22:1, 16). The Virgin Birth accounts for this.

The case stands that the Virgin Birth is explicitly and implicitly taught as an historical fact in Holy Writ and is so viewed by its writers that they take it as a matter of course. Though its very nature is miraculous, it is taken as absolutely historical and factual. It is within this historical framework and in view of the passages pertaining to the remote context involved in the Virgin Birth narratives (not to mention the narratives themselves) that Isaiah 7:14 is to be considered and understood.

THE CENTRAL TEXT OF OUR STUDY

In Isaiah 7:14 the prophet Isaiah provided an explicit prophecy concerning the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. The text reads: "The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

It should be observed that Matthew, an apostle of the Lord, by inspiration clearly applies this prophecy to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth (Mat. 1:23). He quotes it expressly and assigns its origin to the heavenly messenger sent by God! One basic principle of prophetic interpretation is that, when the Scriptures say this is the fulfillment of a particular prophecy, then the *terminus ad quem* of the prophecy is settled. It is then beyond dispute, if we are to accept the testimony of the inspired writers. Isaiah prophesied of a virgin giving birth to a son

who would be called Immanuel or “God with us.” Matthew says that this was fulfilled in Christ, who was born to a virgin named Mary, who (according to Luke’s record) “knew no man.” To reject the Messianic connection of Isaiah 7:14 is to reject the inspired testimony of Matthew and Luke.

Some point to the immediate context of the prophecy in attempting to lessen the scope of the prophecy and apply the fulfillment to the days of Isaiah and Ahaz of Judah. Regarding the background, indeed the prophecy is given by the former to the latter pertaining to the then-current crisis that Ahaz and the Southern Kingdom faced from the alliance of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) with Syria—which alliance is embodied in the respective kings Pekah and Rezin who are the nemeses of Ahaz (cf. 7:1-13). God had challenged Ahaz through Isaiah to ask a “sign” (a miraculous mark or token) that God would deliver the Southern Kingdom from her enemies. Ahaz, impiously feigning humility, refused to ask, whereupon the patience of God exemplified in the actions and voice of the prophet is exhausted. It is then that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is given. On this basis some then assert that the prophecy must have an application to Ahaz’s day and is to be so limited.

There are others who, knowing and believing the ultimate application of the prophecy to Christ, will maintain a dual application of the prophecy as concerning primarily a fulfillment in some form in the days of Ahaz but ultimately the fulfillment recorded by Matthew and Luke in the birth of Jesus Christ. In this regard, the first fulfillment would involve an eighth century, B.C., *young woman*, and thus not a virgin in the full and proper sense of the term, who was either present or known to both Isaiah and Ahaz as the focal point of that application, who would conceive at some time then future and bear a son, whom she would then call “Immanuel.” A more innocuous variation of this latter view, which I at one time held, is that a literal “virgin” was involved in the primary fulfillment, though she would obviously not have been a virgin at the time of the conception of her son. She would have been a virgin at the time of the prophecy but not at the time of its fulfillment. I do not consider brethren who hold this view as necessarily liberal in their beliefs. In fact, some very strong and sound preachers of the Gospel have held to some form of this view. I simply believe it now to be wrong and reject it on the totality of the evidence. Now, to be certain, any view that denies the ultimate fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ

is a dangerous false doctrine as it implicitly rejects a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith and is at direct odds with the clear testimony of Holy Writ, as we have already shown! Any view, also, that would uphold a translational butchering of the text must also be rejected as not being true to the integrity of the text.

The use of *sign* in the prophecy of Isaiah is of special significance in that it implies in the Scriptures a miraculous connection. This is true of both the Hebrew term (Wilson 394) and the Greek term used by the LXX translators (Thayer 573-74; Sophocles 986). This certainly points to an extraordinary fulfillment of the prophecy. It also makes a dual fulfillment quite unlikely in that it would presuppose the miraculous for the earlier application just as much as for the latter. The dual application view is forced to concede that the only sense in which the primary application could occur in the days of Ahaz and be miraculous is in the prophesying of it beforehand. There would be no real virgin birth then in the days of Ahaz. This, to say the least, involves a strange use of *sign*.

There is also a problem created by the name of the child, *Immanuel*. In Matthew's quotation he certainly sees in the name a reference to the Incarnation itself as a result of the conceiving of the son by the virgin. He defines it for his readers as meaning "God with us," which idea naturally fits the nature of the Son of God incarnate in human flesh. How this could apply in a suitably meaningful sense to a purely mortal child in the days of Ahaz is difficult to imagine. The closest consideration might be that the child would but *symbolize* God's presence with the nation in the midst of her trials. No literal force could be assigned to it in such a connection.

Another problem besetting the notion of a fulfillment in the days of Ahaz is the fact that the original text uses the definite article in both the Hebrew and its LXX translation in modifying and identifying the "virgin" (Heb. *almah*). It would seem from this that one particular virgin was in view in the prophecy. We know by virtue of inspiration's own commentary on the text in Matthew 1:23 that Mary was ultimately in view, which militates against applying it to any other woman. The definite article would seem to preclude a dual application in this respect (Hailey 84).

The biggest problem with applying the prophecy to an eighth century fulfillment (whether completely or in a dual fulfillment) lies in the

use of *virgin* (*almah*). Some, wrongfully, insist that the term simply means “young woman.” Many of the modern versions (actually perversions) have adopted this view in *translating* the text. Beginning with the Revised Standard Version, modernists and post-modernists have offered this translation for the term to try to get around the obvious miraculous implications of the text. It is significant that every major translation before the Revised Standard Version had always rendered the word as “virgin.”

This rendering, however, ignores the salient fact that Matthew quotes the text and applies it to a woman who was indeed a virgin in the fullest sexual sense of the word. Undeniably, Matthew teaches that the proper fulfillment of the passage is to be found in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth to Mary, whom he calls in the Greek tongue *parthenos*, a term which does certainly reflect the literal idea of her having never known a man (Mat. 1:23; cf. Parkhurst 509). By what criteria are we to reject Matthew’s testimony (as well as that of Luke) and accept that of individuals who by and large have admitted that they hold little regard for the inspiration of the sacred text? It should also be noted that the LXX translators rendered *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 themselves by *parthenos*, an indication of the understanding of the Hebrew scholars of that great translation of *almah* in their own vernacular.

Even if one were to concede (which we definitely do not) that *almah*, or even its Greek equivalent *parthenos*, could, under certain contextual constraints be translated as “young woman,” what proves that Isaiah 7:14 is such a case? The answer is that there is no real evidence to support it. Regardless of what *possible* renderings may be given to words within certain contexts, it does not follow that such renderings are always possible or desirable elsewhere. With regard to the text of Isaiah 7:14 one must still confront the explicit, precise, and lucid testimony of Matthew and Luke, and the conclusion of their testimony as it bears on Isaiah 7:14 is inescapable! The text says that “the virgin shall conceive.” She would be a virgin at the time of the conception. Mary’s case suits this condition of things completely. She was a virgin before she conceived Jesus, when she conceived Jesus, and remained a virgin until after she had given birth to Jesus. Isaiah therefore had in mind a “virgin” in the strictest sense of the term, not merely a “young woman.” He said that she would conceive and give birth to a son called *Immanuel*, which name testifies to the extraordinary character and na-

ture of the event in the eye of the Hebrew prophet! Jesus Christ is our “God with us,” God incarnate in flesh (John 1:14)!

Furthermore, while the lack of time and space forbids a more thorough examination of the meaning of *almah*, one should examine the following occurrences of the term in the Scriptures (Gen. 24:43; Exo. 2:8; Psa. 68:25; Pro. 30:19; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8). Rex Turner surveys and summarizes these uses in his excellent lecture on the Virgin Birth (170-71). Homer Hailey also provides a summary in his *Commentary on Isaiah* (84-85). E. W. Hengstenberg, a Hebrew scholar of no mean ability, stated without hesitation that *almah* “designates only a virgin, and never a young married woman” (166).

Where then is the first real *virgin* who preceded Mary in time and space? Where is her *son* who is conceived exactly as Mary’s great Son was? Even those who hold to a dual prophecy and contend that there was another real *virgin*, though not one who conceived as such, in the days of Isaiah and Ahaz, must admit that they are at a loss to find such an one anywhere in the text so as to satisfy the question and the demands of the construction!

What of the immediate context of Isaiah 7:14? Does it not furnish a suitable background for a translation of *almah* as “young woman”? The immediate context of the prophecy concerns, as we have noted, Israel and Syria against Judah. Pekah and Rezin were the kings of the allied powers respectively, while Ahaz, a lineal descendent of David, reigned in Jerusalem of Judah. Rezin and Pekah (7:1) went up against Jerusalem to lay siege, but their military efforts came to naught. However, one thing was accomplished. Wicked Ahaz was moved in his “heart”—disconcerted—by this alliance (7:2)! Thus, Isaiah was dispatched by the Lord to utter a word of hope and consolation for Jerusalem and “the house of David.” It will be remembered that God had promised that He would leave the line of David on the throne in Jerusalem as a “light” unto David—i.e., to his royal house (cf. 1 Kin. 11:36). The message that Isaiah spoke then was that the coalition would be broken (Isa. 7:4-9). Rezin and Pekah, who are portrayed as “smoking firebrands,” indicating that their power has run its course like the firebrand whose flame has gone out, leaving only the smoldering embers, would be destroyed. Their fierce anger was already burnt out, and their days were numbered. The rising Assyrian Empire would ultimately absorb both kingdoms.

As assurance of the fulfillment of this prophecy, Isaiah called upon Ahaz to ask the Lord for a “sign”—a miraculous mark or token—that showed His involvement in the matter, viz. that what would happen was indeed by God’s hand—whereupon, with feigned piety, Ahaz responded: “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD” (7:10-12). Isaiah then rebuked the wearisome monarch (7:13), and declared that the Lord Himself would thus give the “sign.” This sign is set forth in verse 14. Isaiah added in association with this prophecy: “Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings” (7:15-16).

Isaiah then turned his attention to the chastisement that Assyria, the nation which would destroy the coalition, would also administer to Judah for her sins (7:17-25). This would, ironically, be brought about in part due to the alliance that Ahaz had made with the king of Assyria over reliance upon God’s power to deliver and preserve His cause and people!

Advocates of the “young woman” *translation*, and even those who hold to some form of dual prophecy for verse 14, appeal to this background as proof that Isaiah was speaking in verses 14-16 of an event, at least in part, to be realized in the days of Ahaz (regarding the son who would be conceived). First, this still overlooks the universal use of *almah* in the Hebrew Old Testament to contemplate a *virgin* in the strictest sense. Second, it fails to account for the proper meaning of *sign*. How would it be a “sign”—a miraculous mark or token—for a “young woman” to conceive a male child? If that were true, only the prophecy itself could qualify as being miraculous. Third, the position makes the fatal interpretative flaw of maintaining that prophesy must be totally confined in its scope to its immediate, historical connections. It ignores that there are often remote connections that must be considered as well—especially as pertains to Matthew 1:23! Oftentimes, the prophets addressed messages to those of their own day in an highly personalized form, though the *terminus ad quem* (or fulfillment) was centuries removed from their time (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12)! The immediate context may furnish the *terminus a quo* (the ground point or starting point for reckoning the time or nature of fulfillment) to a prophecy, but not necessarily always its *terminus ad quem*. As a result, while there

are a number of examples of dual prophecies in the Old Testament, it is not necessarily the case that a dual fulfillment for Isaiah 7:14 is demanded by the context. The position creates more problems than it ostensibly resolves.

How then was this miraculous event called the Virgin Birth to be a “sign” unto Ahaz in particular and unto “the house of David” in general? It would be such even as the fulfillment of all other Messianic prophecies and promises were signs to men and women, even from the time of the Garden of Eden. Remember, that Adam and Eve evidently assumed that God was fulfilling the seed promise of Genesis 3:15 in their own day. Only through further revelation would the full scope of the earliest Messianic prophecy become known. Remember, as well, that it was by virtue of a promise to be realized in its scope centuries hence through Isaac, that Abraham, believing God could raise him from the dead, was prepared to offer his son of promise (cf. Gen. 22; Heb. 11:17-19)! The then-unrealized promise constituted the comforting assurance that Abraham’s heart must have surely yearned for as he faced the trial in the mountains of Moriah!

What is the application of Isaiah 7:15-16? While we admit the difficulty of these verses, the problem is not insurmountable. First, a basic hermeneutical principle holds that the unknown must be interpreted in light of the known, the obscure in light of that which is plain. We are certain of the meaning of Matthew 1:23 and, by extension, its subsequent force and bearing upon Isaiah 7:14. Therefore, to interpret these verses in any way that calls into question the teaching of Matthew 1:23 is from the outset erroneous. Second, it seems to me that the emphasis in the text of Isaiah 7:15-16 is upon the period of normal maturation for a child. Thus, just as the virgin-born child would reach accountability knowing therefore to choose the good and refuse the evil, even in so many years (about twelve), comparatively speaking, Rezin and Pekah would be overthrown (Hengstenberg 160-161). It is interesting to note in this regard that Christ was born into a financially poor environment (hence the reference to “butter and honey,” often the food of a people in a countryside depleted by war (cf. Isa. 7:22). Further, Jesus was about His Father’s business at the age of twelve (Luke 2:40-52). This plausible explanation, nonetheless, more than adequately accounts for the prophecy being fully applied to Christ.

Finally, there is the second prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Christ child that bears directly upon this case. In Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah also, using the prophetic perfect, prophesied:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

This passage is again clearly fulfilled in Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 2:11). The proximity of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 to the prophecy of 7:14 is not happenstance, but has some bearing on the scope of the latter's scope. How could the child, the son of the text be born and yet be "the mighty God" and "the everlasting Father"? The Virgin Birth! Further, the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 obviously bears yet further consolation for the house of David that the Messiah was coming to take His rightful place on David's throne. One cannot consider the scope of Isaiah 7:14 without accounting for Isaiah 9:6-7 as well. This would tend to argue against referring the identity of the child of Isaiah 7:14 to some unknown, nondescript boy of eighth century B.C. Judah.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

There are several implications of the truth of the Virgin Birth. Let us briefly set these forth.

1. The inspiration of the Scriptures is demonstrated. The fact that such an incredible prophecy came to pass emphasizes inspiration.
2. The Deity of Christ is proved. It is only fitting that He, who performed so many great signs and wonders, came into the world by the means of a miracle of just such a stupendous nature. He Himself by His unique person is the greatest miracle. He is one person with two distinct natures (one human and the other Divine).
3. The falsity of the modernist and postmodernist disciplines of anti-supernaturalism is seen. The testimony of the Scriptures must be either accepted or rejected. Either the Virgin Birth happened or did not. If it did happen, which is the fact of the matter, then the miracles of the Bible have a logical rationale

and were in fact a reality, and the Bible does not need “de-mythologizing.”

4. The sinfulness of abortion is also demonstrated. That which was conceived in Mary was a person named Jesus Christ. If one will compare Isaiah 7:14 with the equally inspired quotation of it in Matthew 1:23, he will see that the Bible unequivocally equates conception with “being with child”—not as having a lump or tumor that becomes a child.
5. The humanity of Christ is preserved. He was not merely a phantom or emanation from the Father. He was God incarnate in flesh and blood, and thus subject to the temptations and self-imposed limitations thereof (cf. Heb. 4:14-15; 5:8-9). There is solace and salvation for man and vindication for God’s just and righteous nature in the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ! The Virgin Birth made it possible for Christ to become not only the efficacious sacrifice for man’s sins, but also our Mediator with the Father and our Intercessor before the very throne of Heaven (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2).

CONCLUSION

We have examined the great prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 regarding the Virgin Birth of Christ. We have considered in relation to both its immediate and remote contexts. We have seen how the text fits into the flow of biblical revelation, marching inexorably in God’s redemptive plan to the coming of the Son of God into this world of sin and woe as the precious Babe of Bethlehem. In so doing, we have examined: (1) an important clarification as to what is meant by the phrase, *the Virgin Birth*, viz. by it we refer to the means of conception; (2) the concurrence of the Scriptures with this doctrine in general and the doctrinal framework thus for the Isaiah prophecy; and (3) the central and crucial verse of Isaiah 7:14, which serves as the prophetic hinge tying the birth of Christ even to the very first promise made in Holy Writ. We have also (4) observed some of the consequences that implicitly follow from the fact of the Virgin Birth of Christ.

Let us always be thankful that Christ condescended to come into the world out of His great love for humanity (Eph. 5:1-2; John 3:16; 15:14ff; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16) so He could die for our sins that we might live in eternity with Him, who is our elder Brother, and with

the beloved Father, and the blessed Holy Spirit. Were there no Virgin Birth, there could be no Calvary! The cardinal doctrines of Christianity are inter-related and inter-dependent. They stand together as a great bulwark against doubt, despair, and discouragement. Let us arise and go forth to conquer in the name of Him who lives and reigns upon the throne of David!

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ENDNOTE

¹I am much indebted to brother Turner for his insights and knowledge in this area of study, as well as in many others. My own lecture borrows heavily from his excellent lecture, which I first heard as a student in the old Bellview Preacher Training School in Pensacola, FL, as to its approach and formation of argument.

STRENGTH FROM THE LORD

ISAIAH 40

Sherman Offord

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INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 40 is a message of strengthening comfort originally written to the ancient Jews. This chapter teaches the New Testament Christian the history of the church's preparation as well as the superiority and sovereignty of God.

In the text we find Hezekiah concerned with affairs of state and personal health. He was praying what I consider to be one of the most fervent of prayers—that God would grant him more time. During such times one will often seek help from the wrong sources. Hezekiah shows the fortitude to seek the only true source of **strength**—God.

Comfort is the consequence or benefit of one's faith in God's strength. It is a consequence because the lack of faith will cause one to fall. "If you believe you will fall, you will fall." Paul writes, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Now the beneficial aspects of faith are *through the roof*:

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).

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).

The United States military prowess is a comfort or benefit to its citizenship because of their faith in their government to protect them. Its citizens enjoy freedom and free enterprise as a direct result of their faith in the strength of its military. Peace of mind then allows them to function on a daily basis without the constant fear of molestation.

The maturity of one's faith mandates his sense of security. The stronger that sense of security, the more confident he conducts himself. Isaiah warned Hezekiah that comfort (strength) from war relied not upon the "arms of men," but upon strength (comfort) from God:

And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence *is* this wherein thou trustest? I say, *sayest thou*, (but *they are but* vain words) *I have* counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so *is* Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him. But if thou say to me, We trust in the LORD our God: *is it* not he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar? (Isa. 36:4-7).

And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land (37:6-7).

TAKE COMFORT (STRENGTH) IN THE COMING OF THE LORD

A Charge to Comfort (Strengthen) God's People (Isa. 40:1-2)

We gain comfort (strength) from God's Word:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope (1 The. 4:13).

But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour (Mat. 9:22).

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3).

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (2 Cor. 1:4).

The Bible conclusively shows there is no comfort separate and apart from God. He is the source of all strength, as He created all things including man.

The rest of the book could be outlined in this way: Speak comfortably by strengthening their faith (40-48); Warfare is accomplished by God's strength and not man's (49-57); and Sin is pardoned totally by God (58-66).

Isaiah 40 is in the time frame between two morally and spiritually decadent entities—Ahaz and Manasseh. While Hezekiah observed the shining “epitome of fatherhood” in Ahaz, there is little doubt that Isaiah influenced him during his childhood. Ahaz was a spiritual weakling at best and certainly not a godly father, yet Hezekiah was one who obeyed God.

The prophet Isaiah spent much of his time dealing with royalty. He was contemporaneous with Micah as they both prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in the South, while Pekah and Hoshea were reigning in the North. Isaiah acknowledged that he was in the service to an *awesome God*.

Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts (6:5).

Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (41:10).

I *am* the LORD: that *is* my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images (42:8).

This helps to give the reader a mental picture of the times. However, the other half of the equation is that of Hezekiah's corrupt son, Manasseh. “Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: *and* they together *shall be* against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still” (9:21).

Hezekiah is distinguished as a shining light in Judah's history between two of the worst kings to ever rule in Judah: his father Ahaz and his son Manasseh. These three kings and their nature shows that the doctrine of hereditary depravity and predestination as taught by Calvin and his followers are false. If hereditary depravity were true, then a father as rotten as Ahaz could not have had a good son like Hezekiah, and the good king Hezekiah could not have had a son as degenerate as Manasseh.

In seeing the goodness of Hezekiah sandwiched between these two evil kings, one must conclude that the prophet Isaiah had a great influence upon his life. Isaiah was a living sermon whom Hezekiah could

see. Isaiah persistently stressed the conditions which man must meet to obtain true comfort. In this way Isaiah (40:3-8) became the forerunner of John who is the voice of one preparing people for the coming of the Lord (Mat. 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-5). The preparation of God's people can only be the result of **education** and **remembrance**.

Education

Education is acquiring knowledge. God affirms that man can know certain things. Notice in the passages following *that they may know*.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, **that they may know** that, as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with thee (Jos. 3:7).

Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as *do* thy people Israel; and **that they may know** that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name (1 Kin. 8:43).

Nevertheless they shall be his servants; **that they may know** my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries" (2 Chr. 12:8).

That they may know that this *is* thy hand; *that* thou, LORD, hast done it (Psa. 109:27).

That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. *I am* the LORD, and *there is* none else (Isa. 45:6).

Isaiah had a deep and profound faith in God. He sought that which God sought—the salvation of God's people. In Isaiah's mind was the awesome magnitude of God's Holy Majesty. He also knew that the salvation of any nation was by faith in the one true God. Valeton said of Isaiah:

Never perhaps has there been another prophet like Isaiah, who stood with his head in the clouds, and his feet on solid earth, with his heart in the things of eternity and with his mouth and hand in the things of time, with his spirit in the eternal counsel of God and his body in the very definite moment of history (qtd. in Robinson 22).

Remembrance

The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. **There is no remembrance** of former *things*; neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with *those* that shall come after (Ecc. 1:9-11).

I will therefore **put you in remembrance**, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not (Jude 5).

But, beloved, **remember ye the words** which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 17).

Stephen (Acts 7) put the Sanhedrin in remembrance of their history as he preached to them. However, they did not appreciate the history lesson and murdered him instead.

Isaiah was one who made full proof of his ministry. He was a sterling example of what Paul told Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Notice what many would term as his trial sermon:

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah 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. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the **whole head is sick**, and the **whole heart faint**. **From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness** in it; *but* **wounds**, and **bruises**, and **putrifying sores**: they have **not been closed**, neither **bound up**, neither **mollified with ointment** (Isa. 1:1-6).

Isaiah shows man’s need for salvation by showing his condition. However, he brought this condition upon himself by his own sin. For man to be saved, he must simply submit to the Will of God. Submission takes man humbling his will to do God’s Will. Today it seems as if humility is a negative word to man because of man’s pride. Man’s pride tries to help God. Man often tries to help but often does the wrong thing. Consider these few examples: (1) Eve’s attempted to help Adam by getting him to follow her lead. (2) Sarai’s attempt at helping bought into existence the nation of Ishmaelites. (3) When the daughters of Lot tried to help, it resulted in the birth of two nations: Moab and Ben-ammi. This list could be multiplied greatly but serves the purpose to show that when man tries to help God, it ends up badly.

Man’s salvation was in the mind of God from the foundation of the world:

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret **from the foundation of the world** (Mat. 13:35).

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you **from the foundation of the world** (25:34).

That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed **from the foundation of the world**, may be required of this generation (Luke 11:50).

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me **before the foundation of the world** (John 17:24).

According as he hath chosen us in him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

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** (Heb. 4:3).

For then must he often have suffered **since the foundation of the world**: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (9:26).

Who verily was foreordained **before the foundation of the world**, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Pet. 1:20).

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain **from the foundation of the world** (Rev. 13:8).

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life **from the foundation of the world**, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is (Rev. 17:8).

What man must do is: “Let go and let God.” All that God has ever required of us is total submission. Because of Adam and Eve’s lack of faith, God embarked upon a humanitarian tutorial tour. He began to work things out to implement the last phase of His “scheme of redemption.” “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Part of that plan involved the Law of Moses to bring us to Christ: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (3:24-25).

Then Christ, at that time prepared by God, was revealed to all flesh (Jew and Gentile) for the salvation of all (Isa. 40:5; cf. John 1:14-18). Isaiah is then reminded of the nature of man. Man is flesh and will wither as grass. Man's nature is set in contradistinction to God's Word which will stand forever (Isa. 40:6-8).

From the beginning of Hezekiah's kingship, he directed Israel's focus to God (2 Chr. 29:3). No doubt Isaiah's fearlessness as he dealt with Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had to be a factor in Hezekiah's development to do God's will.

Zion (Jerusalem) to Announce the Coming of the Lord God (Isa. 40:9-11)

Ahaz's reign was an unbroken litany of sin. Paul's words aptly describe this time when he wrote: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). Ahaz had his evil influence on the people of his day. For sixteen years Ahaz worshiped and served Moloch (the god of Ammon) instead of Jehovah God. He may have been the first Jewish king to involve himself in the gruesome and appalling practice of burning children alive:

Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and **offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall**. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to *their own land* (2 Kin. 3:27).

The leader of the people, Ahaz, had darkened the minds of the Jews turning their minds to gods who were not God. Resistance in times such as these would require great strength, which only comes from one source. It was this type of a situation to which Hezekiah became king and Isaiah prophesied. Because of this background Rawlinson points out:

The prophet has accepted into the depths of his spirit God's announcement that the true spoiler, "the rod of his anger, and the staff of his indignation," is not Assyria, but Babylon. He has accepted the sentence that his people is to go into captivity (65).

God's Word will stand forever. It is that which gives man hope and strength. Yet it cannot provide those things unless it is proclaimed. Some commentators perceive that Zion is to be the receiver, and not the publisher of the message that was to convey joy. What a wonderful message Isaiah had for the people. God would subdue the foe and reward His people (Isa. 40:10). God acts as a Shepherd carrying the

lambs which are unable to walk in His own arms and gently leading those who are feeble and delicate (40:11).

THE INCOMPARABLE GREATNESS OF GOD

He Is Beyond Human Measure and Counsel (Isa. 40:12-14)

No one can successfully tell God to do anything. When man tries to teach or give advice to God, he grows arrogant to the point of becoming wiser than God in his own mind. Listen how Paul characterizes the Gentile world, but it is true of any who become great in their own mind and leave God out.

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 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 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 (Rom. 1:23-26, 28).

Job was a man who was able to trust God even though he suffered greatly and he did not know why he was suffering. Possibly, Job had the mind-set of many today who think they deserve to live well. When something happens to their life, they start saying: “What have I done to deserve this?” Yet Job retained his great faith in God; so during this inexplicable suffering, he would say:

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.... How many *are* mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy? Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt thou pursue the dry stubble? (Job 13:15, 23-25).

Man, on his own, cannot comprehend the end of things which are presently taking place. Isaiah could see clearly the dark picture of imminent destruction coming upon Judah due to her abominable spiritual status. Yet he, by revelation, was able to look beyond the present darkness and coming destruction to the incredible brilliance of God’s promised kingdom which would be established “in the last days” (Isa. 2-4).

Before Him the Nations Are Nothing (Isa. 40:15-17)

The Hebrew for “very little thing” (*daq*) describes something of the smallest size. Gesenius says, “beaten small, fine, minute...fine dust... something small or fine, dust, particle” (205). This is a wonderful tribute to God’s mindfulness. Though the nations are as fine dust or dust particles to God, yet God knows the hairs on our head. “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Mat. 10:30).

Men Compare God to Their Constructions (Isa. 40:18-20)

People thought that they could make a god which they could worship. How far had they fallen? Just, a few years earlier (2 Chr. 29:3) Hezekiah corrected his father’s errors:

He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan (2 Kin. 18:4).

We observe that Hezekiah had to destroy the brazen serpent. It was something God had commanded Moses to make, but it had through time become an object of worship itself:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:8-9).

It is folly for man to make an object and then to worship it as something that is superior to us. God warned:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing 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 to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me (Exo. 20:3-5).

Paul identified covetousness as a form of idolatry when he wrote: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Yet far too many today covet wealth and their possessions. Many preachers today (instead of wealth and possessions) covet fame in the church. This is evidenced by the current distress we are facing.

Many a workman has trusted his money (education, friendship, etc.) to provide everything he needs—including a god! God desires man to be faithful to Him. God uses *trust* 134 times in the Bible. Notice a few examples of God instructing man Whom they are to trust:

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in **his name shall the Gentiles trust** (Mat. 12:17-21).

And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men *it is* impossible, **but not with God: for with God all things are possible** (Mark 10:24-27).

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is *one* that accuseth you, *even* Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. **But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?** (John 5:45-47).

God Is Too Great, for No Likeness Can Be Equal to Him (Isa. 40:21-26)

Isaiah 40:21-22

No idol, whether built by man's hands or an honest motive of heart, can compare with the one true God. Man, in comparison to God, is nothing; he is as a "grasshopper." Jesus spoke of man's inability to do things of himself and instead his need to depend on God:

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? (Mat. 6:27-30).

Isaiah 40:23-24

God created the world and all things therein in six days (of twenty-four hours each). While deism states that God then abandoned it, God continues to be actively involved in this world:

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13).

Isaiah 40:25-26

Isaiah shows that God has no equal. Judah (and anyone who has an idol today) needed to give up their idolatry and worship Him:

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Mat. 4:10).

Lack of Trust in God Rebuked;**He Provides Strength to the Weary (Isa. 40:27-31)**

God expects man to trust in Him. This is the way that is right but also best for man. When man (whatever the age) fails to trust in God, he will exhaust the things of this world seeking what only God can bring. The only true source of hope and of renewed strength is found in God. After some particularly hard sayings, many of Jesus' supposedly *faithful* disciples left Him, prompting Him to ask:

From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto 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 6:66-68).

If we are to truly be God's people, we must be resilient when we commit sin. Jesus told Peter (but it equally applies to us): "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

THE KEY VERSE DENOTES THE ONLY SOURCE OF STRENGTH

The last verse reaches a culmination of what has gone before. "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and*

they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). Let us consider what Isaiah says in this marvelous verse.

Wait

He first instructs them to wait or to be patient and endure. These all relate to their salvation. Webster defines *wait*: “to stay in place in expectation of... to remain stationary in readiness or expectation... to pause for another...” Thus, we would say, “I went to the place of meeting.” Each time Isaiah uses this word, there are some common aspects involved in its usage.

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation (Isa. 25:9).

Notice some of the ways Isaiah uses *wait* along with additional passages:

Rejoicing in his salvation:

Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we **waited** for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee (Isa. 26:8).

And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but **wait** for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me (Acts 1:4).

To rest in expectation and patience:

O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble (Isa. 33:2).

If a man die, shall he live *again*? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come (Job 14:14).

What if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22).

To stay—not to depart:

And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with *their* face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me (Isa. 49:23).

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).

To stay—to continue by reason of hindrance.

My righteousness *is* near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust (Isa. 51:5).

(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation) (2 Cor. 6:2).

To look watchfully:

Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee (Isa. 60:9).

Lord

“Lord” renders the Hebrew *adonai* and the Greek *kurios*. It is a title of dignity and honor, acknowledging the authority of the one so addressed. In many translations, when *Lord* is printed in small caps (LORD), it is the translation of the Hebrew Jehovah (Yahweh or YHWH), as it is in our text. Jehovah is the proper name of the God of Israel. Many times Isaiah uses Jehovah, when in the New Testament it is applied to Jesus. The Hebrew *adonai* is also used of Jesus along with the Holy Spirit. As simply a matter or title of respect, *adonai* is used for kings (Gen. 40; 2 Sam. 19), for princes and nobles (Gen. 42; Dan. 4), for a husband (Gen. 18), for a prophet (1 Kin. 18; 2 Kin. 2), and for a respectable person (Gen. 24). The Greek *kurios* is used for God and man. *Kurios* (like *adonai*) denotes authority or master. The one who is to have control of our lives (has the authority over our lives) is that One who created life.

Renew

Renew is defined as “to make like new, restore to freshness, vigor, or perfection.” It implies something has gone into a state of decay or depravation and now is being restored. Four times Isaiah affirms Judah’s need to be restored.

And I will **restore** thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city (1:26).

But this *is* a people robbed and spoiled; *they are* all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, **Restore** (42:22).

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to **restore** the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth (49:6).

I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and **restore** comforts unto him and to his mourners (57:18).

He also uses the idea of to re-establish or to confirm.

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and **confirm** the feeble knees (35:3).

Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people **renew** *their* strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment (41:1).

Paul uses the idea of renewing our mind to live according to God's will: And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Strength

Strength is defined as "firmness; solidity or toughness; the quality of bodies by which they sustain the application of force without breaking or yielding." Isaiah uses this word thirty-five times in thirty-three verses.

Woe unto *them that are* mighty to drink wine, and men of **strength** to mingle strong drink (5:22).

For he saith, By the **strength** of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man* (10:13).

Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my **strength** and *my* song; he also is become my salvation (12:2).

Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy **strength**, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips (17:10).

Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken, *even* the **strength** of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, *nor* bring up virgins (23:4).

Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: *there is* no more **strength** (23:10).

Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your **strength** is laid waste (23:14).

For thou hast been a **strength** to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones *is* as a storm *against* the wall (25:4).

Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH *is* everlasting **strength** (26:4).

Or let him take hold of my **strength**, *that* he may make peace with me; *and* he shall make peace with me (27:5).

And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for **strength** to them that turn the battle to the gate (28:6).

That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the **strength** of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! (30:2).

Therefore shall the **strength** of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt *your* confusion (30:3).

For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their **strength** *is* to sit still (30:7).

For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your **strength**: and ye would not (30:15).

And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, *and* **strength** of salvation: the fear of the LORD *is* his treasure (33:6).

I say, *sayest thou*, (but *they are but* vain words) *I have* counsel and **strength** for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? (36:5).

And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day *is* a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and *there is* not **strength** to bring forth (37:3).

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with **strength**; lift *it* up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (40:9).

He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth **strength** (40:29).

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* **strength**; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint (40:31).

Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew *their* **strength**: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment (41:1).

Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the **strength** of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid *it* not to heart (42:25).

The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his **strength** faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint (44:12).

Surely, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and **strength**: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed (45:24).

Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my **strength** for nought, and in vain: *yet* surely my judgment *is* with the LORD, and my work with my God (49:4).

And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb *to be* his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my **strength** (49:5).

Awake, awake, put on **strength**, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. *Art* thou not it that hath cut Rahab, *and* wounded the dragon? (51:9).

Awake, awake; put on thy **strength**, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean (52:1).

The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his **strength**, Surely I will no more give thy corn *to be* meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured (62:8).

Who *is* this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this *that is* glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his **strength**? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save (63:1).

And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their **strength** to the earth (63:6).

Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where *is* thy zeal and thy **strength**, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? (63:15).

Run

Run indicates a certain type of motion which carries different meanings. Some of its definitions are “to go faster than a walk specifically: to go steadily by springing steps so that both feet leave the ground for an instant in each step...to go without restraint: move freely about at will... to go rapidly or hurriedly...to move on or as if on wheels.” Isaiah uses this word five times in four verses.

And your spoil shall be gathered *like* the gathering of the caterpillar: as the **running** to and fro of locusts shall he **run** upon them (33:4).

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall **run**, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint (40:31).

Behold, thou shalt call a nation *that* thou knowest not, and nations *that* knew not thee shall **run** unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee (55:5).

Their feet **run** to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction *are* in their paths (59:7).

Weary

Weary refers to those “exhausted in strength, endurance, vigor, or freshness,” and words such as *tired* or *fatigued* would be synonyms. Isaiah uses *weary* seventeen times in sixteen verses. Again, notice some of its usages.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am **weary** to bear *them* (1:14).

None shall be **weary** nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken (5:27).

And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; *Is it* a small thing for you to **weary** men, but will ye weary my God also? (7:13).

And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is **weary** on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail (16:12).

To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the **weary** to rest; and this *is* the refreshing; yet they would not hear (28:12).

And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a **weary** land (32:2).

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is **weary**? *there is* no searching of his understanding (40:28).

Even the youths shall faint and be **weary**, and the young men shall utterly fall (40:30).

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be **weary**; *and* they shall walk, and not faint (40:31).

But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been **weary** of me, O Israel (43:22).

Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages *were* heavy loaden; *they are* a burden to the **weary** *beast* (46:1).

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to *him that is weary*: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned (50:4).

Walk

Walk is defined as “roam, wander...to move along on foot: advance by steps.” In addition to its literal usage, *walk* is often used in a figurative way, meaning “to pursue a course of action or way of life.” We find this word eighteen times in seventeen verses in Isaiah. Notice some of the times Isaiah uses it:

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will **walk** in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (2:3).

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us **walk** in the light of the LORD (2:5).

Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and **walk** with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing *as* they go, and making a tinkling with their feet (3:16).

For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not **walk** in the way of this people, saying (8:11).

That **walk** to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! (30:2).

And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This *is* the way, **walk** ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left (30:21).

No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall **walk** *there* (35:9).

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall **walk**, and not faint (40:31).

Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that **walk** therein (42:5).

Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not **walk** in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law (45:24).

Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass *yourselves* about with sparks: **walk** in the light of your fire, and in the sparks *that* ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow (50:11).

Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, *but* we **walk** in darkness (59:9).

Faint

Faint and its differing forms translate several Hebrew terms. It carries the meaning of “exhaustion, loss of resilience, disheartened, languid” and sometimes the idea of “cowardly,” or “melting in fear.” We find this word eight times in Isaiah (once it is “fainted”).

Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart **faint** (1:5).

Therefore shall all hands be **faint**, and every man’s heart shall melt (13:7).

It shall even be as when an hungry *man* dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, *he is faint*, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion (29:8).

He giveth power to the **faint**; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength (40:29).

Even the youths shall **faint** and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall (40:30).

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not **faint** (40:31).

The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is **faint** (44:12).

Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God (51:20).

Paul says that as the Christian continues to live for the “glory of God,” looking to the eternal reward, he will not faint. “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

CONCLUSION

Paul says:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

He describes the Old Testament Law as schoolmaster:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24-25).

The prophets are still teaching today if we will but heed them. In their generation, they taught God's law to a hard-headed people—much like the people of today. Also like today, the people gave various excuses for their disobedience. Isaiah stressed faith in God to renew one's strength. When we place our faith in Him, we will have strength from the Lord. "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. 40:31).

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THE SUFFERING SERVANT

ISAIAH 53

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INTRODUCTION

No doubt, *Preaching From The Prophets*, is a much needed study. The topic we will study is “The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53).” This prophecy is a reference to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, and thus is a Messianic prophecy. For the sake of the unbeliever who is not yet convinced of the Deity of Jesus, let us say that if God’s suffering servant in Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in Jesus, then there can be no doubt that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, and the Son of God.

After introducing Isaiah’s prophecy, it will be shown that Isaiah 53 can pertain to no one but Jesus of Nazareth and that it is an unconditional prophecy. Moreover, the fact that God’s Servant would be lowly, rejected, and despised, will be emphasized. It will also be considered that the sufferings of Christ would be violent in nature and would involve the offering of Himself vicariously and voluntarily. It will be seen that His offering would result in the justification of many and the Servant’s triumph over sin and Satan, and His sufferings and sacrifice would result in His glory and victory.

The apostle Peter states concerning prophecies of the Messiah:

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. 1:10-11).

The prophecy of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isa. 52:13-53:12) is fittingly summed up in Peter's words, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," because, as Isaiah predicts, His sufferings were followed by His exaltation in glory.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUFFERING SERVANT PROPHECY (ISAIAH 52:13-53:12)

The entire prophecy of the Servant is comprised of the last three verses of Isaiah 52 and all of Isaiah 53.

There are five paragraphs of three verses each. It begins and ends with the Servant's exaltation (first and fifth stanzas); and set within this is the story of Christ's rejection in sections two and four, which in turn frame the centerpiece (stanza 3, vv. 4-6), where the atoning sacrifice is expounded (Coffman 508-09).

The song deals with the whole of time: the past, present, and future. In the first stanza (52:13-15), the prophet speaks in future tense; in the second, third, and fourth stanzas (53:1-9), he speaks in the past tense (as if future events had already been accomplished); and in the fifth stanza (53:10-12), he again speaks in future tense (Hailey 434-35).

The first stanza (52:13-15) serves as an introduction to chapter 53, and in this section the themes of chapter 53, the Servant's suffering and exaltation, are condensed (Hailey 434-35). Isaiah declares:

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for *that* which had not been told them shall they see; and *that* which they had not heard shall they consider (52:13-15).

The terms used by Isaiah (*exalted*, *extolled*, and *very high*) suggest a progressive development (Hailey 435). Delitzsch says that the chain of thought is "he will rise up, he will raise himself still higher, he will stand on high." He states: "The three verbs (of which the two perfects are defined by the previous future) consequently denote the commencement, the continuation, and the result or climax of the exaltation." He holds that this prophecy finds its fulfillment in Christ's

resurrection and ascension, and His sitting down at the right hand of God (Delitzsch 305).

Visage (52:14) refers to the Servant's general appearance. The idea of Him being marred more than any man is that of disfiguration or defacement. That disfigurement is more so than any man or to the point that he no longer "retained the appearance of a man" (Barnes 256). It can readily be understood why this would be the case given the tremendous distress and sorrow which the Lord Jesus endured on this earth. The awful scourging and beating which He endured and then the crucifixion (with His twisting in anguish and His fight for every single breath while on the cross) all added to the marring of His visage. In fact, the distortion of the Lord's body is predicted some one thousand years before the crucifixion by David. In this prophecy, the Sufferer speaks in the first person: "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" (Psa. 22:14). Barnes says:

The sense is, "as many were shocked at him—his form was so disfigured, and his visage so marred—so he shall sprinkle many nations." That is, the one fact would correspond with the other. The astonishment would be remarkable; the humiliation would be wonderful, and suited to attract the deepest attention; and so his success and his triumph would correspond with the depth of his humiliation and sufferings. As he had in his humiliation been subjected to the lowest condition, so that all despised him; so hereafter the highest possible reverence would be shown him. Kings and nobles would shut their mouths in his presence, and show him the profoundest veneration (255).

Sprinkle (52:15) is interpreted by many as an allusion to the various rites of sprinkling blood, water, oil, or ashes in the Mosaic Law; and, hence, it is held to be a reference to the Lord's cleansing of the nations (Bright 181). On the other hand, some view the meaning in the sense that "those who were astonished at what they had seen of His marred visage are now startled, caused to leap up in amazement, trembling with awe as they behold His exaltation" (Hailey 436).

AN OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 53

- I. The Early Years and Rejection of Jesus (53:1-3).
 - A. The Arm of the Lord—Divine Power
 - B. His Lowly Beginning and God's Care over Him
 - C. He had no Worldly Appeal, but was Abhorred
- II. A Willing Substitute for the Guilty (53:4-6).

- A. The Divine Plan and the Suffering Savior
- B. The Necessity of the Cross
- C. Only a Divine Person could do what He did
- III. The Innocent and Submissive Savior (53:7-9).
 - A. The Meek and Quiet Subjection of the Redeemer
 - B. The Trial and Death of Jehovah's Servant
 - C. God's Special Interposition in the Burial of His Servant
 - D. He was Guiltless
- IV. The Resurrection and Future Glory of the Servant of Jehovah (53:10-12).
 - A. Christ in the Divine Scheme of Man's Redemption
 - B. His Spiritual Seed
 - C. His Resurrection
 - D. The Savior and His Glory

ISAIAH 53 APPLIES EXCLUSIVELY TO JESUS

The inspired writers of the New Testament verify that Isaiah's prophecy refers to Jesus of Nazareth. When Philip came to the Ethiopian eunuch, he was reading the prophet Isaiah—words which we know to be from Isaiah 53:7-8:

The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth (Acts 8:32-33).

He did not understand who Isaiah was talking about: "And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" (8:34). In answer, the next thing we read is how that Philip preached to him of Jesus, as the inspired Luke records: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (8:35). Shortly thereafter, upon hearing Jesus preached the Ethiopian would confess Him as the Christ the Son of God and, accordingly, be baptized in His name (8:36-39). This case within itself should be ample proof that Isaiah 53 declares the Deity of Jesus, and conversion to Christ is based upon His Deity.

The apostle Peter also applies Isaiah's prophecy to Christ. He wrote:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

Verse 21 refers to Christ, and verse 22 is obviously taken from Isaiah's statement: "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth" (53:9). The fact of Christ bearing His sufferings without retaliation, as stated by Peter here, is strongly reminiscent of Isaiah's prophecy of the Servant being brought "as a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7). In addition, Peter's reference to the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings "in his own body on the tree" offers unmistakable evidence that Jesus Christ did fulfill the prophecy of the Servant's suffering in the stead of mankind. In fact, the end of verse 24 is almost an exact quotation from Isaiah, who said that "with his stripes we are healed" (53:4-5). When Peter speaks of people as "sheep going astray" but now having returned to the "Shepherd and Bishop" of their souls, it is obvious that man's salvation has been effected by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Therefore, His sacrifice must necessarily be the fulfillment of Isaiah's words: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6).

Paul, in Romans 10:16, verifies that the saving message of Jesus Christ is referred to by Isaiah by applying it to the great disbelief with which the Gospel was met: "Who hath believed our report?" (Isa. 53:1). This question is a rhetorical one and is designed to emphasize the lack of true believers among all people—especially the Jews (Young 340). "The 'our report' is the message of salvation made possible by the Suffering Servant" (Bright 182).

No doubt, the message of salvation here is a clear reference to "the Gospel of Christ," which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Isaiah's next question is: "to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?" (Isa. 53:1). Albert Barnes makes this insightful observation:

The arm is that by which we execute a purpose, and is often used as the emblem of power. Here it denotes the omnipotence or power of God, which would be exhibited through the Messiah. The sense is, "Who has perceived the power evinced in the work of the Redeemer?" (259).

In this connection, it is interesting to note that God exhibited His power through Jesus by the working of signs (miracles), which were designed to produce faith in Him as the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31). For the most part, the Jews did not believe in Him and perceive the connection between Him and God because of the condition of their hearts. Accordingly, John applies Isaiah's words to their disbelief:

But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias 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? (John 12:37-38).

The miracles had a spiritual purpose which is connected to Christ's Gospel wherein they are recorded.

The "arm of the Lord" is a reference to the power of God being manifested through Christ in the Gospel. There is no other way to call on Him in Gospel obedience, and thus, to know Him and the saving effects of His power. Paul declared:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:13-17).

Paul's words, in connection with the quotation from Isaiah, convey the fact that a refusal to obey the Gospel amounts to disbelief. "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" (10:16; cf. Isa. 53:1). This is an essential lesson that the religious world desperately needs to learn!

Another evidence that Isaiah 53 pertains to Jesus is the fact that the inspired Matthew connects the miraculous help, which Jesus gave to those with all kinds of infirmities and sicknesses, to the work of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:4.

When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses (Mat. 8:16-17; cf. Isa. 53:4).

Obviously, by this application, Isaiah and Matthew are not implying that miraculous healing is available today through the Gospel.

Physical diseases and infirmities result from Satan's work (Luke 13:16); according to the general biblical teaching, they are the consequence of man's violation of God's physical and spiritual law. For this reason Matthew (8:17) can apply this verse to the Messianic healing of diseases and infirmities. But more is involved. For in healing physical maladies Jesus was foreshadowing His expiatory work of healing our spiritual sicknesses and their evil effects (1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 9:28) (Hailey 438).

Matthew, John, Luke, Paul, and Peter all declare that Isaiah 53 is speaking of Jesus the Christ, as does the teaching of Philip the evangelist. When men inspired of God declare a thing to be true, that should be the end of all controversy.

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).

Furthermore, only Jesus could have fulfilled the requirements of the One described by the inspired pen of Isaiah as the sin-bearer of mankind: "But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Of all who would ever live upon the earth, only Jesus Christ "knew no sin," "did no sin," was "without sin," and is "undefiled, separate from sinners" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15; 7:26). Of Christ, John wrote: "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). All others have sinned and will sin (Rom. 3:23; Isa. 53:6). Edward Young states:

If, however, the language is to have meaning, the servant must be one who was himself utterly free of transgression and iniquity, else his vicarious suffering could be of no avail. If one who himself was iniquitous bore the sins of another, then there is a travesty upon justice, for the sin-bearer in this case would have need that his own sins be borne by another (348).

Moreover, Isaiah clearly declares the innocence and guilelessness of God's Servant: "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth" (53:9). Peter refers this prophecy to Christ when he speaks of Him: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22).

In Isaiah 53:9, Isaiah indicates that it was the intent of the executioners to make His grave with the wicked, but by God's interposition His Servant was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Carroll 226). Indeed, Jesus Christ was crucified between two malefactors (thieves), one of whom later repented (Mat. 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:32-43). However, His body was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Joseph of Arimathaea), "wherein was never man yet laid" (John 19:38-42; Mat. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-55).

The Deity of Jesus becomes more and more apparent as the implications are here considered. Throughout the remainder of this study, even more evidence will come forth showing that Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of the Messiah—Jesus.

ISAIAH 53 IS AN UNCONDITIONAL PROPHECY— WHICH WAS SURE TO BE FULFILLED

In the Scriptures, there were two kinds of prophecy which the prophets of God uttered—conditional and unconditional. An example of a conditional prophecy is the short but powerful sermon which Jonah preached to Nineveh: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jon. 3:4). As a result of Jonah's warning, the entire city repented, including the king (3:5-10). Consequently, the very thing that Jonah was afraid of happened, in that, God spared the city (3:10-4:3). By meeting the conditions of God's will, Nineveh's destruction was averted. Later in history she was destroyed by God for wickedness of which she did not repent (Nah. 3:1-19).

The fact that God's prophecies relating to the redemption of sinful man were unconditional is a powerful expression of His goodness. Regardless of how wicked man would become or did become, this did not prevent God from giving His only begotten Son, and neither did it prevent the establishment of His covenant and His kingdom. Therefore, prophecies which relate to God's provisions for the salvation of man are unconditional in nature (e.g., Isa. 2:2-4; 7:14; 52:13-53:12; Dan. 2:44; Mic. 5:2; 4:1-3; Zec. 12:10; Psa. 16:9-11; 22:1, 14-18; 68:18;

110:1; Jer. 31:31-34; et al.). Such prophecies were in no way dependent upon man's obedience, because they were in the eternal plan and purpose of God (cf. Eph. 3:8-12; Rev. 13:8). In fact, it is man's sinfulness which necessitated God's determination to fulfill such prophecies without respect to man's conduct. Otherwise, man would never have had the opportunity to be cleansed of sin and to go to Heaven.

The verb tense of Isaiah 53:3-9 denotes the unconditional nature of this prophecy and the absolute certainty of its fulfillment. The prophet speaks in the past tense of events which would not take place until some seven centuries later, when Christ came to this earth to perform His redemptive work.

The exact fulfillment of every detail of the Suffering Servant prophecy offers ample evidence to the truth-seeker that the Bible is indeed given by the inspiration of God. This prophecy did not come from Isaiah's intellect, or from "any private interpretation," but it came through God's spokesman as he was "moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Only God has the knowledge and power to call "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).

GOD'S SERVANT: LOWLY, REJECTED AND DESPISED

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isa. 53:2-3).

The prophet's foresight of the humble beginnings of Jesus is expressed here as he describes the Servant as being known to Jehovah but not well-known among the people (Bales 101). The Servant growing up before God as a tender plant evidently expresses the care of the Father for His servant. Jesus said: "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). The fact that the Jewish situation and political conditions of the time did not offer Christ any support are possibly portrayed by the language, "root out of a dry ground" (Bright 182). Earthly conditions were indeed hostile to the Root of Jesse (Isa. 11:1, 10; Rom. 15:12). The figure here of a shrub springing up in a barren waste perhaps implies also that the Messiah would lack outward splendor. Barnes says that "there would be nothing in his external appearance that would attract attention, or meet the expectation of the nation" (260).

The fact that Jesus grew up and lived in lowly circumstances cannot be disputed. There was no outward attraction to draw men unto Him. Yet, this is not to be taken as a description of His physical appearance as such. Coffman states: “What is meant is that none of the trappings of wealth, office, social status, or any other such things which are so honored among men, belonged to Jesus” (510).

Nevertheless, men and women of all classes were drawn to Him, as they had been drawn to no other. His attractive qualities were not of a carnal nature but were spiritual, as men had contempt for Him on every hand (Carroll 224-25). There was a great beauty in Jesus, but it was in the nature of His being; it was rooted in the essence of His character. It was in Who He was, and what He was. It consisted in His life, ways, deeds, mighty works, teaching, love, and perfect example. It was in what He stood for and what He stood against as God in the flesh—the Son of God and the Son of man. It was an appeal to the heart and soul of man. It was a spiritual attraction, that could not die with the physical and perish with the material.

How sad it is to see congregations claiming to be churches of Christ trusting in human philosophies of church growth that appeal to the flesh. This is nothing more than conforming to the world, which God forbids us to do (Rom. 12:2). The drawing power of Christ always has been and always will be the Gospel of Christ (1:16). When people obey the Gospel and continue in it, they live Christ. When only the Gospel of Christ is preached, then Christ is preached. It is only when we live the Christ-like life and declare the truth of Christ in simplicity that people will be drawn to Him. In this way the church glorifies God through Christ. “Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21). Jesus Christ has the power to draw people to Himself, apart from worldly means, as He said: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me” (John 12:32).

Isaiah 53:3 provides more evidence that Isaiah’s prophecy is speaking of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all assert in their record of Christ’s life that He was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” John explicitly states that the One Who made the world was rejected by the world and that His own people did not receive Him: “He was in the world, and the world was made

by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:10-11).

Christ was prophesied in the Old Testament, but the prophet foresaw that, because of the conditions of their heart, the people would reject Him. Even though Israel would not accept Jesus, their rejection did not indicate that He was not the Messiah. Instead it indicated Isaiah had real insight concerning the Lord’s reception (Bales 101).

There is a great lesson here on the danger of rejecting Christ and the Truth. To reject the one is to reject the other. Jesus warned: “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). Moreover, the Jews in rejecting Jesus did fulfill that which was predicted and gave further proof of Jesus as the Messiah and of the inspiration of the Scriptures.

It may well appear strange and lamentable, that when the Messiah came to his own territories, his own people did not receive him, and that this his wonderful and gracious miracles made so little impression on them; but the more unlikely an event is in itself, the more surprising is it that it should have been predicted; and the exact fulfillment of such strange predictions, just in proportion to their strangeness, tends to remove every suspicion of imposture from a considerate mind. In their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, they were furnishing evidence that he was the person they denied him to be (Brown 199).

In the Psalms, as here, the pain is accompanied by being rejected and despised (Psa. 22:7; Mat. 27:39) (Westermann 262). Although man would do so, God did not hide His face in disgust with Christ nor despise and abhor the affliction of the afflicted (Psa. 22:24). Accordingly, God’s faithful must remember His promise to them, even in afflictions: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

The people’s rejection of Jesus finally led to His merciless treatment and cruel death by crucifixion. Even when Pilate was determined to let Him go, the Jews insisted on His death (Acts 3:13). The bloodthirsty mob cried: “Let him be crucified” (Mat. 27:22-23). God’s suffering Servant and our suffering Savior has left us an example to follow: “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). Those who follow in His steps are going to be despised and rejected also.

Therefore, when we (the Lord’s people) are persecuted, we would do well to remember the example of Christ and the fact that God does

not despise the righteous—as man does. Furthermore, Christians should not be in self-pity and amazement that such should occur, given the many inspired statements along these lines (Mat. 5:10-12; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:13-17; 4:12-16). In fact, the Lord’s servants are no better than the Lord Himself to suffer for righteousness’ sake—as Jesus taught:

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 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. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me (John 15:19-21).

GOD’S SERVANT: A WILLING SUBSTITUTE FOR SINFUL MAN—WHOSE SUFFERINGS AND SACRIFICE WOULD BE VIOLENT

Isaiah 53:4-6 point to the vicarious nature of the Savior’s sufferings and sacrifice because He is described as a willing substitute for the guilty. The prophet’s words indicate that the Servant in His own person endured the penal consequences due the guilty ones as emphasis is placed on the contrast between “our” and “he” (Skinner 126).

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4-6).

Verse 4 speaks of the fact that the people regarded the servant as one who was defeated in conflict with the Lord, as if undergoing terrible punishment as a result of sin (Baron 87). Yet, the first part of verse 4, and verses 5-6, answer this false assumption. Hailey aptly states:

He was smitten of God only in the sense that God allowed Him to suffer; God provided Him as an offering for man’s sin. Little did the people realize that He was being subjected to such indignities for their sins, not His own (438).

The Servant would be a willing substitute for sinful man.

The meaning is not merely that the Servant of God entered into the fellowship of our sufferings, but that He took upon Himself the sufferings which we had to bear and deserved to bear, and therefore not only took them away (as Matt 8:17 might make it appear), but bore them in His own person, that He might deliver us from them. But when one

person takes upon himself suffering which another would have had to bear, and therefore not only endures it with him, but in his stead, this is called substitution or representation (Delitzsch 316).

Peter's words are an inspired commentary on Isaiah's meaning: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). To show that all mankind are "the unjust," the prophet proclaims, as did Paul, that all have sinned, by saying: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa. 53:6; cf. Rom. 3:23). Yet, God has laid on the sinless and Just One "the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:22; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14). God, by His "determinate counsel and foreknowledge," delivered up His Son, by allowing wicked hands to crucify and slay Him—the Prince of life. This death serves as the Sacrifice for the "*sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:2; cf. Acts 2:22; Rom. 8:32).

Isaiah 53:5 speaks of His being "wounded for our transgressions" but could also be rendered "pierced through," and this usually is accompanied by the thought of being pierced through unto death (Young 347). This is further evidence pointing to Jesus as the suffering Servant in that He was pierced (cf. John 19:34; 19:37; Zec. 12:10). In fact, after His resurrection, Jesus asked Thomas to feel the nail prints in His hands, and to feel into His side, as proof that He was the crucified and risen Jesus (John 20:25-28). Approximately 1000 years before the crucifixion, David prophesied of the Lord's suffering by being pierced: "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet" (Psa. 22:16).

Wounded (pierced) and *bruised* describe a violent and agonizing death. Of course, the Lord suffered in a most horrible way for our "transgressions" and "iniquities" (Vine 168). Delitzsch renders the idea as this: "He was pierced and crushed on account of our sins and iniquities." He states: "There were no stronger expressions to be found in the language, to denote a violent and painful death" (318). The treatment which Jesus willingly endured is beyond human comprehension.

There were many aspects of the Lord's sufferings, in addition to the crucifixion itself. For example, Isaiah, by inspiration of God, foretells of the effect of the terrible beating which He would undergo by scourging by the statement: "with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5; cf. Mat. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1). The inspired words used by

Peter in quoting Isaiah, indicate the brutality of this beating (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24):

These words are quoted from the Greek translation of Isa. 53:5. “Stripes” is from the Greek *molops*, a bruised and swollen welt from which blood trickles, the livid mark on the quivering flesh, red and raw, from scourging. In the Greek the word is singular, as it also is in Isa. 53:5, the body of Jesus being so bruised from the brutal beating he received that there was but one wound or stripe, and this covered his entire body. The instrument by which this punishment was inflicted—the scourge—was a leather whip of cords into which had been woven jagged bits of brass or iron. When these Christian slaves were beaten they were to remember that, however cruel and brutal such beatings were, none equalled that which the Lord suffered prior to his crucifixion (Woods 84).

The Lord’s words to the apostles indicate that after His sufferings and resurrection had taken place remission of sins could be proclaimed to all nations:

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:45-47).

Next, a picture of the innocence and submissiveness of God’s Servant is presented: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

As a lamb being led to the slaughter, the Servant without retaliation and resistance was led away. Indeed, Jesus was the Servant Who gave Himself up by His own volition and in a peaceful manner, although He could have called twelve legions of angels to His rescue (Mat. 26:53-54, 63; 27:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:23). Later, the prophet plainly declares that “he hath poured out his soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12). Moreover, the voluntary nature of these sufferings is seen in the words of Jesus Himself to His disciples, and included in this is the fact that He foresaw what was going to happen and made no effort whatsoever to prevent it. The Lord Jesus willingly subjected Himself to the “many things” that He would suffer (Mat. 16:21; 20:18-19; Mark 10:33-34; Luke 9:21; 18:31-33; John 10:17-18).

Jesus was the One Who never resisted His arrest, trial, and horrible crucifixion—being the moment of agony that it was. The people of Israel should have understood well the concept of the sacrificial lamb being offered on behalf of man’s transgressions (cf. Lev. 9:3; 14; Num. 6:12-14). This offering was typical of the coming Christ, Whose “precious blood” was “as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,” and it effected man’s redemption and his reconciliation to God (1 Pet. 1:19; cf. Eph. 1:7; 2:13-17; Col. 1:14; Rom. 5:8-11). John said of Him: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isa. 53:8). The idea is that of “hostile oppression and judicial persecution were the circumstances out of which He was carried away by death” (Delitzsch 324). All four of the inspired writers testify of the unjust treatment which the Lord received and in which He was led away to be crucified (Mat. 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 18-19).

THE VICTORY AND ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE SERVANT’S OFFERING

The last section of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant of God declares that the Servant’s offering resulted in victory and honor for Himself and justification (salvation) for man.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:10-12).

The fact that God’s pleasure was fully accomplished through His Servant is affirmed here. It was God’s pleasure, and in obedience the Servant was put to grief (cf. Mat. 26:39; Phi. 2:8). It was not something that He deserved, neither was it pleasant for the Father to look upon Christ’s agony. Yet it was the means by which to fulfill His great purpose (Baron 118-119). The Lord would see His seed in that the church,

the people of Christ, would come forth as a result of His redemptive work. Of His spiritual children the Bible states:

“For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.... And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me (Heb. 2:10, 13).

God would “prolong his days” in that Christ was raised from the dead. In fact, Jesus and the New Testament writers declared that the prophets had foretold of His death and resurrection—“according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4; cf. Acts 2:25-28—Psa. 16:8-11; Luke 24:44-46).

Isaiah 53:11-12 present a picture of the Servant and His glory. It would be impossible to apply these words to anyone but the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because no one else could justify sinful man and bear his iniquities. Isaiah states:

He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:11-12).

The fact is that Jesus the Savior was satisfied to please the Father and to offer Himself for the salvation of mankind—even though He did so in tremendous travail and sacrifice. *By his knowledge* could mean either the knowledge that He possesses or the knowledge of Christ on the part of those who would be justified by Him. Both are involved in the salvation of man. “My righteous servant” would have to be Christ Jesus in that all others have been declared unrighteous (cf. Rom. 3:10, 23), except for the “Righteous One”—Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 7:25; 22:14).

The Servant “hath poured out his soul unto death.” The idea of *poured out* is to “(strip or empty, or pour clean out, even to the very last remnant) His life blood into death” (Delitzsch 339). New Testament statements verify that Jesus certainly did do that (Mat. 26:28; John 19:34; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Rev. 1:5); He did so that man might face eternity in a saved state:

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that

look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:27-28).

Although counted and treated as a transgressor, He made the provisions necessary to intercede in behalf of transgressors. Isaiah declares His intercessory works as a fact (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong” indicate that by His sacrifice the Servant would triumph over Satan and sin. “This points to the Servant’s conquest over Satan (the strong one) and the deliverance of many of those whom he holds captive” (cf. Mat. 12:29; John 12:31). In His parabolic teaching, Jesus represented Himself as the one stronger than Satan who is called the “strong man” (Luke 11:21-22; Mat. 12:29). Jesus said, “[he] hath nothing in me” (John 14:30), indicating that Satan cannot hold back the Servant (Hailey 442-443). “Strong ones surround Him, and fight along with Him” (Delitzsch 339). Indeed, those who are with Him are “called, and chosen, and faithful” (Rev. 17:14).

Isaiah 53:12 predicts the triumphs of the Messiah and His glory. The order of Isaiah’s prophecy is humiliation followed by exaltation, as in Paul’s majestic description of the Savior:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phi. 2:8-11).

Jesus is the fulfillment of this and other prophecies which declare that He would first suffer and then enter His glory (Luke 24:25-26).

Isaiah 53 teaches that sacrifice precedes glory. It was through the Lord’s humility and sufferings that He satisfied the Divine Pleasure and brought justification, after which He was glorified. It is only through our humility and obedience to Him that we may enter into His glory.

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8-9).

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. 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. 8:17-18).

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THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION ISAIAH 61:1-3

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INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is like a miniature Bible; he is the Paul of the Old Testament. Isaiah's long ministry ranged from about 740-680 B.C. When Isaiah speaks about Christ, he sounds more like a New Testament writer than an Old Testament prophet. Isaiah's name means "salvation of the Lord."

Isaiah brought good news about the man Jesus:

1. He will be born of a virgin (7:14)
2. He will be a wonderful child (9:6-7)
3. He will be of the family of David (11:1)
4. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him (11:2).

Like Paul, Isaiah was concerned about the salvation of Zion; he wanted God's people to be saved. Paul stated in Romans 10:1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

In our study we want to break down the verses of Isaiah 61:1-3.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD GOD IS UPON ME

Paul 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" (1 Cor. 2:12). We know the things of God because God reveals Himself through the written Word.

In John 20:30-31 we read:

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.

Paul writes: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The Spirit of the Lord was upon Isaiah. God’s Spirit today speaks through the written Word, and as we preach and teach exactly what it says, we fulfill what Peter instructed in 1 Peter 4:11:

If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God; if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul said: “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

THE LORD HATH ANOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD TIDINGS

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10). The good tidings of Isaiah was that the Christ was to come. The arrival of Jesus brought the message of good news and salvation and that it was for all men. He came to seek and save that which was lost.

TO BIND UP THE BROKEN HEARTED

Hearts are broken every day. A loved one dies: husband, wife, son, or daughter, and we grieve. A friendship is betrayed, a lifelong trust is broken. Many things break our hearts. All Christians and especially preachers need to bind up the broken hearted. Notice some of Paul’s statements:

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:15).

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:26).

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).

We are to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Some of our young preachers have expressed that they do not

do funerals, visit the sick, or visit the hospitals, but, brethren, we need to see these as opportunities as doing good and do them. At funerals, we are afforded an opportunity to speak to more lost people than we would in a year. Take this time to plant the Seed as it may be the only time that some will ever hear even a word of the Gospel.

TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES

Paul declares: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sinners are held captive by their father the devil (John 8:44), and they need to be set free. Only the Gospel, good tidings, can do that.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him (Rom. 6:1-9).

And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

However, there are other captives that need to be set free. Depression is a number one health problem in our country. Drug addiction cripples the lives of millions. Alcoholism destroys the lives of countless numbers. Then there are the real prisons full of captives—prisons that are made of steel, concrete, and scissor wire.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me (Mat. 25:34-40).

TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD

Isaiah said: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (55:6). Paul wrote, “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). It has been said: “Yesterday belongs to history, tomorrow belongs to God, and only today belongs to us.”

If Tomorrow Never Comes

If I knew it would be the last time that I'd see you fall asleep,
I would tuck you in more tightly and pray the Lord your soul to keep.
If I knew it would be the last time that I see you walk out the door.
I would give you a hug and a kiss and call you back for one more.
If I knew it would be the last time I'd hear you voice lifted up in praise,
I would videotape each action and word, So I could play them back day after day.
If I knew it would be the last time, I could spare an extra minute or two
To stop and say “I love you,” Instead of assuming you would KNOW I do.
If I knew it would be the last time I would be there to share your day,
Well I'm sure you'll have so many more, so I can let just this one slip away.
For surely there's always tomorrow to make up for an oversight,
And we always get a second chance to make everything right.
There will always be another day to say our “I love you's,”
And certainly there's another chance to say our “Anything I can do's?”
But just in case I might be wrong, and today is all I get,
I'd like to say how much I love you and I hope we never forget.
Tomorrow is not promised to anyone, young or old alike,
And today may be the last chance you get to hold your loved one tight.
So if you're waiting for tomorrow, why not do it today?
For if tomorrow never comes, you'll surely regret the day,
That you didn't take that extra time for a smile, a hug, or a kiss
And you were too busy to grant someone,
What turned out to be their one last wish.
So hold your loved ones close today, whisper in their ear,
Tell them how much you love them and that you'll always hold them dear,
Take time to say “I'm sorry,” “please forgive me,” thank you” or “it's okay.”
And if tomorrow never comes, you'll have no regrets about today.

Author Unknown

“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” (Jam. 4:14). Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:1:

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no

pleasure in them.” This is the acceptable year, not last year, nor next year, but the here and now.

AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD

Isaiah writes about the day of vengeance in Isaiah 63. He says, “For the day of vengeance *is* in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come” (63:4). Consider the following:

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people (Heb. 10:30).

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord (Rom. 12:19).

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

Judgment is coming we must warn others of that day.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent (Acts 17:30).

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).

And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 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 12:47-48).

COMFORT ALL WHO MOURN

“Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Mat. 5:4).

“Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed *are ye* that weep now: for ye shall laugh” (Luke 6:21).

CONSOLE THOSE WHO MOURN IN ZION

Bulletins, emails, and personal conversations reveal the sad condition of the church throughout the world. Brethren, we need to mourn over the condition of the Lord’s church today: congregations bring in the instrument, observe the Lord’s supper any day of the week, women taking leadership roles in the worship, and preachers exchanging pulpits with denominations. Many are at ease in Zion and do not care that they are damning the souls of millions.

TO GIVE THEM BEAUTY FOR ASHES

We need to rise up out of the ashes of despair to see that bad things do happen to God's people, but we can overcome. We can learn from our mistakes; we can do better. We have the ability to keep on trucking. If we have a flat, fix it. If we run out of gas, fill it up. Remember Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi. 4:13). "But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

THE OIL OF JOY FOR MOURNING

A loved one dies and we mourn, but we should not mourn for years to come. Life goes on; there are others that need our support services. Death should not be regarded by Christians as bad. Solomon wrote: "A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (Ecc. 7:1). The Psalmist said: "Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints" (Psa. 116:15).

James tells us: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" (1:2). Weak men that we are, we always look for the easy route, the course of least resistance. However, rewards come to those who persevere and that is what God's Word teaches us to be: faithful, victories, achievers.

THE GARMENT OF PRAISE

The garment we are to wear as a Christian should be that of a meek and gentle spirit—a robe of godly righteousness. When we assemble for worship, it is not the clothes that we wear that should concern us but the spiritual white robe of a godly life. We may have the resources in this life to wear the best that money can buy but appear to God as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

THAT THEY MIGHT BE CALLED TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Psalmist said:

"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" (1:3).

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing (92:12-14).

Too many Christians are like Fruitless Mulberrys. Folks, we are to be bearing fruit—not sparingly, but bountifully.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Mat. 7:15-20).

THE PLANTING OF THE LORD

“Thy people also *shall be* all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified” (Isa. 60:21).

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).

Brethren, if we want to plant the Lord and His church, we are going to have to preach the Word, the Gospel because it is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16). It is truly sad to see and hear of so many brethren who are mimicking the denominations. Some preachers are replacing book, chapter, verse preaching with entertaining sermonettes. In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught: “Behold, a sower went forth to sow” (Mat. 13:3). Are we going forth, or are we content to stay on the porch and do nothing?

THAT HE MIGHT BE GLORIFIED

God was to be glorified in the coming of His Son, Jesus, as He made His presence known in the first century. In the following Scriptures we see how that God is to be glorified. “Unto him *be* glory **in the church** by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:21). In verses 9-11 of this same chapter, Paul makes it clear that the church was part of His eternal plan with Jesus fulfilling that plan.

Isaiah, much like John the Baptist, was a forerunner of Christ. He prophesied of the coming Messiah (Isa. 7:14). Philip was a preacher of the Gospel. In Acts 8 he met an Ethiopian who was reading from Isaiah. The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8. We are told that “Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:36). We preachers today can likewise find many texts to preach on from Isaiah, just as Philip. Remember that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that

we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

WORK CITED

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

THE NEW NAME

ISAIAH 62:2

Michael Hatcher

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INTRODUCTION

Isaiah is the great Messianic prophet of the Old Testament. He lived approximately seven hundred years before the time of the Messiah. As we come to Isaiah 58, Isaiah begins a section dealing with the future glory of the people of God. In this section we see the future glories of restored Zion (Isa. 60-62). One of those future glories is a new name: “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Isa. 62:2). Jehovah is going to give His people a new name. It is this new name we wish to consider.

WHEN THIS NAME WOULD BE GIVEN

In considering when this name would be given, it is first important to notice that this prophecy is dealing with the time of the Messiah and the kingdom He would establish. Thus, we must look to the New Testament period for the giving of this new name. We also see that there are two events that would take place prior to the giving of this new name.

The first event would be “the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness.” *Righteousness* is from a Hebrew word meaning “rightness, what is right, just.” Swanson defines it as

righteousness, justice, rightness, i.e., the act. of doing what is required according to a standard...honesty, fairness, accuracy, i.e., an act. which is proper according to a standard, and not deviant in any way (HGK7406).

The standard which the Gentiles would see is that law which God has given to all men everywhere. As the New Testament church began, it was intended to go to the Jews first (Acts 1:8; 13:45-46; Rom. 1:16). Approximately ten years went by before God determined to have Peter take the Gospel to the Gentile world. This is recorded for us in Acts 10 when Peter is sent by God to the house of Cornelius. Peter recounts this event at what is called the Jerusalem conference by saying,

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe (Acts 15:7).

The second thing mentioned by Isaiah is that kings would see “thy glory.” The first question is: “To what does *thy glory* have reference? Is this speaking of God’s glory or the glory of that institution which the Messiah would establish?” The context would be that it applies itself to that institution which the Messiah established—the church. However, in seeing the glory of the church, one sees the glory of God also. Since Christ is the head and the church is the body, you cannot see the glory of one without seeing the glory of the other. In describing *glory*, one states:

The second major group of connotations is a further extension of the figurative use of the term. In this case the idea is of that which is weighty in the sense of being noteworthy or impressive. Common translations are “honorable, honored, glorious, glorified” (Harris 426).

As the church grew and spread, all men saw the glory of the Lord’s church. However, who are the kings mentioned by Isaiah?

Since the Bible was written when sovereignty (seat of authority) in civil government was viewed somewhat differently than it is today, officials and functionaries whom men today would designate by other titles (commandant, governor, chieftain, etc.) are regularly designated *melek* (Harris 507).

With the understanding of *kings* (Hebrew *melek*) as just defined, the Sanhedrin would fall under this definition (Acts 3-4, 7), possibly the Ethiopian Eunuch since he had charge of the treasury (Acts 8) and would also would certainly include Cornelius since he was “a centurion of the band called the Italian *band*” (10:1).

When taking these two statements into consideration, we must look for a name which is given after the time of the conversion of Cornelius. At this time the *kings* have seen the glory of the church. Peter preached the standard which God established (righteousness) to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. Thus any name we find being used prior to this time, is not that name of which Isaiah prophesied.

WHAT IS THE NEW NAME

In considering what the new name might be, we must look for a name which is given after the conversion of Cornelius. Any name used prior to this time cannot be the new name Isaiah prophesies concerning.

However, there have been various names that have been offered as this new name. Rawlinson points out:

It is not altogether clear what the “new name” is, since in the remainder of the present chapter more than one name is suggested. Rosenmüller supposes “Hephzibah” to be meant. Dr. Kay suggests “the holy people,” and notes that the title of “holy ones,” or “saints,” is given by St. Paul to all Christians (Acts 26:10; Rom. 1:7; 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:2, etc.). Mr. Cheyne thinks that it is some unknown title of honour, akin to that mentioned by Jeremiah—“Jehovah our Righteousness” (Jer. 33:16). “New names” will be given to individual saints in the heavenly kingdom (Rev. 2:17; 3:12) (430).

Watts writes:

The issue of a new name for Jerusalem was broached in 60:14, 18 where the city was now to be called “The City of Yahweh” or “Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” Her walls were to be renamed “Salvation” and her gates “Praise.” These all have strong religious connotations. The need for a new name is also mentioned in 1:26, Jer 33:16, and Ezek 48:35. The new name will be given in v 4 below (312).

However, Sawyer writes:

Nations and kings will see her triumph and new glory, and she will be given a new name determined by God. “Give” (NEB “pronounce”) is a technical legal term meaning literally “designate,” and the word-games in verse 4 can have nothing to do with the name-prophecy here in verse 2 (192).

When we consider all of these names, none of them really fits. *Hephzibah* was not a new name, it was the name of the wife of Hezekiah and mother of Manasseh (2 Kin. 21:1). *Saint* or *holy ones* and its different forms are not a new name, either. The Israelites were often told to be holy because God was holy. Christians were also referred to as being

saints prior to Cornelius' time (Acts 9:13, 32). There are other terms which one can find; however, there is one term which meets the criteria which Isaiah provides.

As we have already established, we must look to a time after the conversion of Cornelius (when the "Gentiles shall see thy righteousness"). Cornelius' conversion is recorded for us in Acts 10 and then Peter rehearses what took place for "the circumcision [who] contended with him" (11:2) in Acts 11:1-18. Shortly after this takes place, we come to Acts 11:26 where we find two terms. Luke writes

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

If we look at *disciple*, we find that this term is often used of Jesus' disciples prior to the church's establishment, and it is used for those who are followers of Christ after the establishment of the church. However, we do find a new term being used—Christian. Luke says that the first time this term is used is at Antioch. Thus, here is a new name that meets the criteria of Isaiah's prophecy.

MEANING OF THE NEW NAME

Various Approaches

In considering *Christian* there are different ways to approach a study of the meaning of the term. In breaking it down it is made up of the root *Christ* and the suffix *ian*, which means "like." Thus, in being a Christian we are to be like Christ. One approach would be to study the attributes of Christ: His compassion, teaching, mercy, et al. Upon learning the nature of Christ, we then should apply those attributes to our lives.

Another approach is to observe the will of Christ. Christ summarizes His will when He says, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34), or again as He says, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (5:30). The will of Christ is to do the Father's will. The Father expressed His will on the mount of transfiguration: "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Mat. 17:5). Thus, the will of the Father is

for us to listen to Christ—hear His words. Those words are recorded for us in the New Testament. We are to obey what is found in the New Testament. This is the same as what Paul told the Colossians, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (3:17).

Christian

However, I would like to approach this in a little different way, yet still breaking the name down in the same way as has been previously noted. *Christian* is one who is “like Christ.” The first thing we should notice is *Christ*. *Christ* is a Greek term which has been transliterated (not translated) into our English language. It is equivalent to the Hebrew “Messiah.” If one translates *Christ* into our English, it would be translated “Anointed One.” Thus, to be a Christian, one must be like The Anointed One. This naturally leads us to some questions about the idea of anointing. *Anointing* was performed by pouring olive oil over a person’s head to consecrate him to a specific work or service. This leads us to the question: “Who were anointed or which works were anointed works?” To answer this we must go back to the Old Testament and consider the offices which were considered anointed offices then. We find there were three offices to which people were anointed.

Anointed Offices

The first office we observe that is one of the offices which were anointed in the Old Testament is that of the priests. This began with the anointing of Aaron and his sons as they were anointed to the priesthood. “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that *they* may minister unto me in the priest’s office” (Exo. 30:30). Moses also commands:

And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall consecrate to minister in the priest’s office in his father’s stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, *even* the holy garments (Lev. 16:32).

We see that the priests were to be anointed, but we also see that they were being consecrated to the work of the priesthood.

Another office we see that was anointed in the Old Testament is that of prophets. There is a specific reference to this in 1 Kings 19:16: “And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room.” Engelhard mentions:

It is only once explicitly mentioned that a prophet should be anointed (1 K. 19:16), but the patriarchs (esp Abraham) are referred to as “my anointed ones” and “my prophets” (Ps. 105:15; 1 Ch. 16:22; cf. Gen. 20:7) (1:129).

While there are not many references, we do see that it is an anointed office.

The third office which was anointed in the Old Testament was that of kings. As Saul is about to be made king, the Bible records: “Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured *it* upon his head, and kissed him, and said, *Is it* not because the LORD hath anointed thee *to be* captain over his inheritance?” (1 Sam. 10:1). At a later date, Samuel reminds Saul of this event: “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee *to be* king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD” (1 Sam. 15:1). Samuel had anointed Saul to consecrate him to the specific work of being king by pouring oil over his head.

Christ—The Anointed One

The Old Testament prophets foretold of the *Messiah* (which is the Hebrew of the Greek *Christ*). Thus, they were foretelling of One Who would come and Who would hold all of these offices, which are anointed offices; thus Christ is “the anointed one.” Thus, let us consider Jesus of Nazareth and that He truly is the Christ.

Jesus as Priest

Jesus was anointed as priest. The Hebrews writer states for us that Jesus is our great High Priest.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (2:17).

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (3:1).

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession (4:14).

Having stated that Jesus is our great High Priest, we can come to a greater understanding of this concept when we realize the work of a priest. Again the Hebrews writer helps our understanding regarding their work when he writes: “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer

both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (5:1). High priests were ordained for the benefit of man in spiritual matters. It was their duty to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Milligan mentions that gifts and sacrifices

are sometimes used interchangeably, as in Gen. Iv. 3-5. But when contrasted, as they are in this case, and also in ch. viii. 3; ix. 9, the former is used for bloodless offerings, and the latter for such as required the life of the victim (150).

It was the responsibility of the priest to make those offerings. The writer again states: “For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore *it is* of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer” (8:3). He again emphasizes the work of a priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices. In speaking specifically concerning Christ, the writer adds that it was necessary for Christ to have something to offer also.

Later the Hebrews writer shows that Jesus did have something to offer. It was His own blood, instead of the blood of bulls and goats which could not take away sins. Jesus took His own blood into heaven itself to make atonement for sinful mankind. He writes:

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (9:11-14)?

A few verses later he adds:

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (vv. 24-28).

A little later he states:

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering

and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God (10:10-12).

The Hebrews writer (whom I believe to be Paul) states that Jesus is our Great High Priest, gives us the work of a priest, and then shows how Jesus meets the qualifications of being our High Priest.

Jesus as Prophet

There is the need to understand what a prophet is. *Prophet* comes from the Greek *prophetes* which is made up of the prefix *pro* meaning “forth” and the root word *phemi* meaning “to speak.” Thus, a prophet is one who speaks forth. When used in a spiritual application, it would be one who is speaking forth for God. Many mistake a prophet for being one who foretells the future. While a prophet may in his speaking forth foretell the future, that is not his work. The primary word translated “prophet” in the Old Testament is *nabhi* which means to boil forth. The spiritual application is the prophet having God’s Word in him and that Word boils forth from him. It is aptly expressed by Jeremiah: “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*” (20:9). Jeremiah simply could not hold God’s Word within himself; he had to speak it forth.

Jesus is God’s prophet today. When Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him to the mount of transfiguration, Peter asks Jesus about building a tabernacle for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. We are then told: “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5). God says we are to hear Christ. The reason we must hear Him is that Jesus is speaking for God. 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. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (John 12:48-50).

When He said that He did not speak “of myself,” He used the word *ek*. This word carries the idea of out from within and shows the point of

origin. The origin of what Jesus taught was not coming out from within Himself, but it originated with the Father. Thus, Jesus was speaking for God.

Jesus is King

This aspect of the anointing of Jesus is disputed. The premillennialist of our day denies that Jesus is now ruling on David's throne. They look for Him to reign on that throne when He returns to set up an earthly kingdom. This denial of Jesus' present kingship is why I have termed *premillennialism* as anti-Christ. Three different times in the New Testament Jesus is described as being King of kings.

Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15).

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful (Rev. 17:14).

And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:16).

When Peter preached that first Gospel sermon, he argued that Christ was raised from the dead to sit on David's throne. Peter said:

Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. 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 2:29-36).

Peter states that Jesus was raised to sit on David's throne, and He is now reigning from heaven while sitting on that throne. Paul later tells us: "For he [Christ] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25).

When writing to the Ephesians, Paul writes:

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which

is to come: And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (1:21-23).

Notice that God the Father made Jesus “far above” all things, and He has put all under the feet of Christ. In addition, Paul says that God has made Him to be head of the church.

Jesus is now reigning as King sitting on David’s throne (which is also God’s throne and Solomon’s throne). He will continue that reign till “all enemies are under his feet” (i.e., till He comes the second time). As King, Jesus has the right or power to command, determine, and then punish violators.

Christian—Like Christ

We are to obey the Gospel and become Christians. As Christians, we are to be like Christ. Since Christ was anointed as a priest, a prophet, and a king; we also should be like Him in being anointed as a priest, a prophet, and a king.

Christians as Priests

While the great Apostate Church has perverted the idea of priesthood into a special class of *Christians* who meet certain requirements and then are incardinated by the *bishop* to engage in public ministry, there is no hint of such things in the New Testament. The Scriptures show that **all** Christians are priest.

We first need to remember that the work of a priest is to offer gifts and sacrifices (Heb. 5:1; 8:3). It is obvious that Jesus offered His blood as a once-for-all sacrifice for sins. Thus, in speaking of the Christian’s priesthood, we are not discussing an offering which would remove sin from anyone’s life. Also, since Jesus made that once-for-all sacrifice for sins, we cannot, as the Old Testament priest, offer animal sacrifices for the sins of others. Thus, the type of sacrifices which the Christian makes must be of a different type. What we find out is that the sacrifices which the Christian offers are spiritual in nature.

Peter writes:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.... But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

Peter describes the Christian's priesthood as first a holy priesthood and then a royal priesthood. In that priesthood the sacrifices the Christian makes are spiritual ones. He then shows that it is showing forth the praises of God. "Praises" is from the Greek *arete*, meaning "virtues" or "moral excellence." We lay aside the darkness of sin and, by our life, to show the qualities or virtues of God: love, mercy, goodness, power, holiness, etc.

The Hebrews writer stated:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (13:15-16).

God gives us the types of sacrifices which we as Christians are to offer to Him. He also states that these sacrifices were to go up to God by Christ. This corresponds to what Peter said that the sacrifices we offer to God were by Jesus Christ. Another point that the writer makes is that these sacrifices are to be offered continually. These are not something that are only to be offered on Sunday or once or twice in our life, but these sacrifices are to be our lifestyle. He mentions three things which we are to offer.

First, we are to offer "the fruit of our lips." We should know that we will be judged based upon what we say. Jesus said:

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned (Mat. 12:36-37).

James shows us how powerful our tongues are (Jam. 3:2-12). Thus, we need to use our tongues for good. While not being exhaustive, some of the aspects of the fruit of the lips would include our singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to Him (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We, as Christians, have the obligation to sing. Another area would be that of prayer. We are to "pray without ceasing" (1 The. 5:17) realizing that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16). We also need to use our tongues in proclaiming God's Word to a sinful world and edifying other Christians.

Second, we are to do good. Jesus is our perfect example in doing good. Peter stated to Cornelius about Jesus: "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). While we cannot do the miracles Jesus did

(since the age of miracles is over), we can see his compassion and acts of kindness and follow those examples. The New Testament often urges us to be involved in doing of good and good works. We are to “abound to every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8), God has “ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10), we are to be “zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14), and be “fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10). When we are doing good works, then: “God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb. 6:10). Paul encourages us:

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

Third, we are to “communicate,” which is from the Greek *koinonia*. It is translated by fellowship” more than any other way. Swanson defines it as: “fellowship, close mutual association...share, participation...willing contribution, gift” (G3126). In the definitions given by Zodhiates, he lists Hebrews 13:16 under: “Communication, distribution, a metonym for contribution, collection of money in behalf of poorer churches” (G2842). When we fulfill our obligation to give of our means on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2), we are having fellowship with those who are offering the “fruit of the spirit” and “do[ing] good.” When we offer prayers to God on their behalf and in support of them, then we are having fellowship with them in the work they are doing or *communicating* with them. Additionally, if we give encouragement (in whatever form, cards, letters, phone calls, etc.), we are sharing with them in their work.

When we offer these sacrifices of praise to God, then we are being the type of priest who is acceptable to God.

Christians As Prophets

We previously defined that a *prophet* is simply a spokesman for another. God uses *prophet* for the relationship between Moses and Aaron. “And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet” (Exo. 7:1). Look at how it is explained:

And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye

shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, *even* he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God (4:15-16).

Moses was going to put words into Aaron's mouth making him a mouthpiece. This makes Aaron Moses' prophet.

When used in a spiritual sense, a prophet is one who speaks forth for God. Normally, when we discuss a prophet in the spiritual sense, we also have in mind one who is miraculously inspired to speak for God. When speaking of Christians, we are not speaking of those today having miraculous ability or being able to speak directly for God. Those gifts ended with the completion of the New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:7-16). The type of prophetic work that Christians are engaged in is the proclaiming of those things recorded for us in the New Testament. In preaching what the Bible teaches, we are speaking forth for God because the Bible is God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16).

In giving the apostles the great commission, Jesus set forth that all Christians are to be prophets for God. He stated: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). While this is directly stated to the apostles, Matthew's account shows that it is applicable to every Christian.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you *alway*, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:19-20).

The apostles were to teach those disciples to do all that Jesus had commanded them—including the going into the world to preach the Gospel. The early church understood this as we observe their actions: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

There was a knowledge that it was the Gospel and only the Gospel which would save man from his sins. "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). Thus there would be the need for Christians to preach that Gospel. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Thus the Gospel of Christ was committed to men to proclaim. Paul writes, "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the command-

ment of God our Saviour” (Tit. 1:3). As Christians go out preaching the Gospel, we are speaking forth for God and thus prophets for Him.

The situation with far too many Christians today is that they do not have enough Bible knowledge to teach others. The situation in Hosea’s day is similar to ours when he wrote:

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 (Hos. 4:6).

We have many today who have been Christians for decades and yet still babes in Christ from a knowledge standpoint. They are not like those whom Peter describes: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Brethren simply do not desire the Word of God anymore. They have allowed the things of this world to crowd out religious thinking and study of God’s Word. The words of the Hebrews writer are what we are seeing today when he writes:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (Heb. 5:12).

We need to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Only by proper study will we be prepared to give an answer: “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). When we fill ourselves up with God’s Word, then we will have no choice but to let it boil forth from us:

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).

Therefore, we are to preach God’s Word, not man’s ideas and thoughts. Paul told Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Peter writes, “If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God; if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Je-

sus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11). What we are hearing preached in so many places today is moralistic stories, jokes, after dinner speeches, etc., and very little to none of God’s Word. We need the admonition of Isaiah: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). The drawing power is the Gospel, not anything else:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6:44-45).

Let us make sure that, as we go out teaching, we teach God’s Word and only His Word.

Christians As Kings

This point seems odd to many Christians. They cannot fathom the idea of Christians reigning. Many think that, instead of the Christian reigning, other things reign over the Christian. After telling the Romans that God justifies us and no one can condemn us because Christ died, rose again, and is at the right hand of God making intercession for us, he asks the question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35). He then lists several things and comes to the conclusion: “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (8:37). A conqueror is one who sits down to rule or reign. Paul has mentioned that the Christian is a conqueror over tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword. He then goes on to add death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God. He is saying these things cannot overcome the Christian, but the Christian rules over all of them. Thus, it is the Christian who is living the abundant life because he is victorious over all the things of this life. Jesus said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The Bible also affirms that the Christian rules here in this world. Paul states we reign in life: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). Later, John will state: “And hast made us unto our God kings

and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). This which John states is not some premillennial idea of a future reign on the earth, it is a present reality for the Christian. He places the kingship at the same time as the priesthood. As we have already noticed, Christians are priests offering up spiritual sacrifices through Christ. Likewise, we are kings now on this earth, ruling with Christ. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul commends them for ruling but condemns them for trying to rule without them. “Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you” (1 Cor. 4:8). Notice his desire is that they would reign. How was this to be accomplished? It was by their being faithful Christians. When they were faithful Christians, then they would be reigning with Paul.

Paul’s letter to the Romans has a long discussion of the Christian’s kingship. In Romans 5:17 Paul mentions that we reign in life by Christ. When we come into Romans 6, we learn a great deal about our reign. He admonishes us not to continue in sin. He then reminds us that in our baptism we are baptized into Christ’s death, we are buried with Him, and then raised to walk in newness of life. This becomes the basis of our reign. Notice how he begins to work in our reign as Christians at this point. Since we have been raised with Christ, the old man of sin was crucified. This results in the body of sin being destroyed so we are no longer enslaved to sin. Upon our baptism we are freed from our sin and living with Christ—living the Christian life. Then notice what he writes:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (6:12-14).

When we no longer serve sin (live the Christian life), we rule over sin. When we commit sin, then sin is ruling over us.

When we rule over sin in our life, we are also reigning over Satan and death. Just as death has no more dominion over Christ (6:9), death will have no more dominion over the Christian. The Christian is one who has passed from death to life: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed

from death unto life” (John 5:24). Paul will thus reveal that when death comes to the Christian, he has victory over it.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Since we have the victory (the victors are those who reign) over death, it is no surprise that John will write, “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). Those who are “in the Lord” are blessed when they die because of the victory they have in Christ.

When we live the Christian life, we will be reigning over sin and not allowing sin to rule over us. In ruling over sin, the Christian also is reigning over Satan and death; the Christian has passed from death to life. Since the Christian is ruling over death and has passed from death to life, he also has victory in heaven. Peter writes:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

When we live the Christian life in all that being a Christian involves, then we can say with Paul:

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).

WHO IS GOING TO GIVE THIS NAME

There have been some who have claimed that the name Christian was given in derision by the enemies of the church. For example, Barclay writes:

Christian means These Christ-folk. It was a contemptuous nickname; but the Christians took it and made it known to all the world. By their

lives they made it a name not of contempt but of respect and admiration and even wonder (90).

However, this does not correspond with what is stated by Isaiah. Isaiah states that God would give this name, not the enemies of His people. Keil and Delitzsch write:

She is called by a new name; and who could determine this new name? He who makes the church righteous and glorious, He, and He alone, is able to utter a name answering to her new nature, just as it was He who called Abram Abraham, and Jacob Israel. The mouth of Jehovah will determine it (...to pierce, to mark, to designate in a signal and distinguishing manner, *nuncupare*; cf., Amos 6:1, Num. 1:17) (7:586).

Watts also expounds on this point when he writes:

Another goal is to have a new name that Yahweh himself will choose. Zion or Jerusalem is not enough. Perhaps those names had come to remind the people of destruction, judgment, and ruin. The Bible has several instances where the giving of a new name was appropriate to recognize a new status or character (e.g., Israel instead of Jacob, Gen 32:28; Mara instead of Naomi, Ruth 1:20; Paul instead of Saul, Acts 13:9). The issue of a new name for Jerusalem was broached in 60:14, 18 where the city was now to be called “The City of Yahweh” or “Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” Her walls were to be renamed “Salvation” and her gates “Praise.” These all have strong religious connotations. The need for a new name is also mentioned in 1:26, Jer 33:16, and Ezek 48:35 (312).

There is no question that the new name in Isaiah is one that would be given by Jehovah Himself; however, is that the case with *Christian* in Acts 11:26? As noted previously, some say that *Christian* was given in derision and ridicule instead of by God. Newman and Nida actually state:

“The church” is qualified here as meaning the people of the Church. It is agreed by the commentators that *Christians* was a title given to the believers by the non-Christian community, perhaps because the believers said “Christ is Lord,” in contrast with the confession of the Roman world “Caesar is Lord” (228).

While they state that it “is agreed by the commentators,” that is not totally true. Not all commentators agree that it was given by “the non-Christian community.” Consider the words of Adam Clarke as he writes:

It has been a question, by whom was this name given to the disciples? Some think *they* assumed it; others, that the *inhabitants* of Antioch gave it to them; and others, that it was given by *Saul* and *Barnabas*. This later opinion is favoured by the *Codex Bezae*.

He then goes on to defend the Divine appointment of the name by writing:

The word *χρηματίσαι* in our common text, which we translate were called, signifies in the New Testament, to appoint, warn, or nominate, by Divine direction. In this sense, the word is used, Mt 2:12 ; Lu 2:26; and in the preceding chapter of this book, Ac 10:22. If, therefore, the name was given by Divine appointment, it is most likely that Saul and Barnabas were directed to give it; and that, therefore, the name Christian is from God, as well as that grace and holiness which are so essentially required and implied in the character.

Barnes states: “But by whom, or with what views it was given, is not certainly known” (185). He later states his view, when he writes:

I incline to the opinion, however, that it was given to them by the Gentiles who were there, simply as an appellation, without intending it as a name of reproach, and that it was readily assumed by the disciples as a name that would fitly designate them. If it had been assumed by them, or if Barnabas and Saul had conferred the name, the record would probably have been to that effect; not simply that they “were called,” but that they took this name, or that it was given by the apostles (186).

However Barnes gave a compelling argument for *Christian* being Divinely given when he writes:

The word used here, and translated were called—*χρηματίσαι*—means, (1) to transact any business; to be employed in accomplishing anything, etc. This is its usual signification in the Greek writers. (2) To be divinely admonished, to be instructed by a Divine communication, etc., Mt 2:12; Lu 2:26; Ac 10:22; Heb 8:5; 11:7; 12:26. (3) To be named, or called, in any way, without a Divine communication, Ro 7:3, “She shall be called an adulteress.” It cannot be denied, however, that the most usual signification in the New Testament is that of a Divine monition, or communication; and it is certainly possible that the name was given by Barnabas and Saul (186).

Barnes mentions every use of the term except for Matthew 2:22 where it is translated “warned,” and it is a warning that comes from God. Instead of dividing it into three definitions, others seem to limit the definition to two: “1. Impart a divine message, *make known a divine injunction/warning*... 2. to take/bear a name/title (as so and so), to go under the name of” (Arndt, Danker, and Bauer 1089). Or as Friberg, Friberg, and Miller write: “(1) of what God makes known... (2) active with a passive sense *bear a title or name, be called, be known as*” (410). Swanson puts it: “1. Reveal divine message... 2. Give a name to, bear a name, be called (Acts 11:26; Rom. 7:3)” (DBLG5976).

When looking at these definitions, the word as used by Luke and the majority of the New Testament writers has reference to a Divine communication or calling. Balz and Schneider state: “This verb occurs 9 times in the NT, 7 times referring to injunctions or prophecies from God” (3:474). The two passages which are used to establish the definition that it is not always a Divine communication or calling is the passage under consideration and Romans 7:3 where Paul says, “she shall be called an adulteress.” However, this could be a Divine calling also. God does call one an adulteress if she is *married* to someone to whom God has not joined her. Thus, it is very likely that every occurrence of $\chi\rho\eta\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\alpha\iota$ found in the New Testament carries the idea of a Divine origin. When we place it in connection with Isaiah’s prophecy, we can then understand that this was not given by the enemies of God’s people but was given by the mouth of Jehovah.

CONCLUSION

We have been given a wonderful name by God—the name of Christian. We belong to Him and are to be like Him in all we do and say. We as Christians need to be out preaching God’s message to all people, offering spiritual sacrifices to God, and ruling over sin and Satan in our lives. While man has a far different standard of what a Christian is, we need to make sure we measure up to God’s standard of Christianity.

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THE MAN: JEREMIAH

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INTRODUCTION

It is understood by students of the Bible that Jeremiah was one of the great prophets in the Old Testament. What some may not understand or realize is that this book, which bears his name, gives it readers more of an insight into Jeremiah's character, his personal life, and his profession than do any of the other books of the Old Testament prophets. This allows the student to come to a better realization and appreciation of what this man of God dealt with and what he faced during this turbulent time in Judah's history. Elders, preachers, and all members of the Lord's body can and should learn from this book what it takes to live a godly life in an ever-increasing ungodly world. As the apostle Paul stated: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET

Jeremiah's name means: "one who Jehovah appoints or establishes." He was born in the village of Anathoth "in the land of Benjamin" (Jer. 1:1), which was about three miles north of Jerusalem. The approximate date of his birth was in 647 B.C. (Orr 1588). His father, Hilkiyah, was a priest making Jeremiah of the priestly lineage. Around 627 B.C., God called Jeremiah to prophetic office, and, according to the Scriptures, he was possibly as young as twenty years of age. Jeremiah 1:2 mentions God calling him in the 13th year of Josiah's reign. Josiah was the last godly king with which the southern Kingdom of Judah was to be blessed. Even in Josiah's reign, storm clouds were hovering over this small nation due to their continued wickedness and rebellion to God's commandments.

Jeremiah 1:2-3 mentions the time period in which Jeremiah would prophesy:

To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

Two kings that also reigned while Jeremiah prophesied, but are not mentioned in these verses, were Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was also known by the names Jeconiah and Coniah. Their names not being mentioned in these verses may have been due to the short reign of both of these kings. Barnes comments:

The whole period contained in this verse is no less than 40 years and 6 months, namely, 18 years under Josiah, two periods of 11 years each under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and 3 months under each of the omitted kings, Jehoahaz and Jeconiah. The capture of Jerusalem took place in the fourth month, but its destruction was in the fifth month (11-12).

Altogether, Jeremiah prophesied for little more than forty years during the reign of five kings, he experienced the “best of times” under king Josiah and the “worst of times” witnessing the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar’s forces upon the land. God had told him: “Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land” (1:14). Jeremiah saw the inhabitants of Judah carried away into Babylonian captivity in the years 606, 597 and 586 B.C., which ended with the total destruction of the temple and Jerusalem.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar had set up a governor over the remaining inhabitants of Judah. Gedaliah was the man chosen as the Scriptures tell us:

Now when all the captains of the forces which were in the fields, even they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed unto him men, and women, and children, and of the poor of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon (40:7).

However, Gedaliah would not govern for very long, for he was murdered by “Ishmael the son of Nethaniah” (41:2). Fearing retaliation by the Chaldeans for Ishmael’s actions, many of the people fled to Egypt for safety (43:5-7). God had warned them not to flee to Egypt—but to remain in Judah, and they would be safe there. He would protect them from the king of Babylon and would be with them “to save you, and to

deliver you from his hand” (42:11). However, they refused to trust His words in the past, and they would refuse to put their trust in Him at this point and instead would flee to Egypt. They took with them Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch (43:1-13).

There in Egypt Jeremiah continued to prophesy to the people and they continued to refuse to listen. We do not know of the demise of this great prophet of God. One tradition tells us that Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt by his own people, and another tradition mentions he was taken from Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, along with the scribe Baruch, and he died in Babylon (Halley 318).

Jeremiah was not allowed to marry and have children, to enjoy the fruits of family life like the average man. God told him: “Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place” (16:2). This would show how desperate the times were, and having a wife and children to watch over would only cause him more grief due to those desperate times (Liddell).

Some of Jeremiah’s contemporaries were the younger prophet Ezekiel who was prophesying to God’s people already in bondage in Babylon. In addition to Ezekiel, Daniel was prophesying in the palace of king Nebuchadnezzar. Habbakkuk and Zephaniah also prophesied during the time of Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH: A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

The great prophet is a study in contrasts—the contrast of his personality with what God called upon him to prophesy. He was tenderhearted and easily moved to feelings of remorse for his people especially understanding the calamity that was approaching them, but he would continue to prophesy exactly what God told him to prophesy. James Orr, speaking of Jeremiah’s personality, wrote:

We learn that he was, by nature, gentle and tender in his feelings, and sympathetic. A decided contrast to this is found in the hard and unmerciful judgment which it was his mission to announce.... This contrast between his naturally warm personal feelings and his strict Divine mission not rarely appears in the heart-utterances found in his prophecies (1589).

Due to his personal nature and the message of doom he prophesied, he was hated, slapped in the face, treated as a traitor by his own people, ridiculed, despised, ostracized, thrown into prison, and threatened with death. At one time, like Job, Jeremiah cursed the day that he was born: “Cursed *be* the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein

my mother bare me be blessed” (20:14). Another time his prophetic calling seemed too much for him, and he was going to quit prophesying God’s Word altogether, but he could not and would not. Jeremiah stated: “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*” (20:9). In other words, Jeremiah had to speak God’s words; he could not stop.

We can well understand why Jeremiah has been called the “weeping prophet” with what he witnessed in his life. He knew the punishment that God would bring to bear upon his beloved country of Judah, and yet the people did not want to listen to his words of warning. A number of verses speak of his weeping for his brethren, but one verse stands out from the rest: “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (9:1). Members of the church can understand how Jeremiah felt with the direction the church has taken over the last thirty to forty years and, along with Jeremiah, proclaim: “Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam. 3:48).

Once again the contrast of his personal nature and the task God gave him seems to cause him to be one of the saddest and loneliest characters in the Scriptures. Some have referred to him as a type of Christ and indeed Jeremiah was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). Even Jesus’ apostles mentioned that some of the people thought that He was Jeremiah (Mat. 16:14). As Christ wept over Jerusalem in His day (23:37), so did Jeremiah weep and lament over Jerusalem in his. Lamentations speaks of his remorse over the destruction of Jerusalem, and one verse in particular describes Jeremiah’s feelings: “*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). Too many were indifferent to the calamity that had befallen Jerusalem and the nation of Judah, and it broke his heart to see that.

Too many are indifferent to the state of the Lord’s church in our day, and that circumstance should break our heart. Liberalism has ravaged the Lord’s body over the years to such an extent that many congrega-

tions that call themselves the church of Christ are no longer His. Darrell Conley, speaking of the condition of the church, stated: "The church is not simply in the midst of a 'falling away,' it has 'done fallen.' Faithful churches are now in a minority, as far as what we call 'the brotherhood' is concerned" (61). This writer lived in the western United States for more than twenty years and knew firsthand the degree of apostasy that is prevalent in that part of the country. For decades, so-called Christian colleges have sent men into the fields who did not have a true respect for the authority of God's Word. Likewise, unfaithful schools of preaching have played an ungodly part in the apostasy of that part of the country. However, the blame has to be also applied to brethren who "love *to have it so*" (Jer. 5:31). Brethren, who chose not to "stand in the gap" (Eze. 22:30) but to say nothing and idly stood by while the precious bride of Christ was ravaged, will also have to bear the blame. Yes, one can understand why Jeremiah lamented the destruction of Jerusalem with the words: "*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" The attitude of indifference is alive and well in our day.

A man of contrasts, yes, but first and foremost Jeremiah was a prophet of God! He would not compromise God's Word for any reason. He would not stand idly by while Judah further sullied herself. He would not hide under the cloak of not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings or simply sweep the sin under the rug. Too many congregations led by "weak-kneed preachers" have already done that today. Preachers are to be like Jeremiah: love the lost, love the brethren, but preach the Word. They are to be as Paul described, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). They are to speak the truth in love of the truth and in love of those who hear it.

JEREMIAH'S WORK

God called him "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). Most of his work would be negative or destructive, but wickedness had to be rooted out and destroyed before the building and planting could take place. Unfortunately, the people did not want to hear what Jeremiah had to say. Though he was unwavering in preaching God's message of repenting and turning back to God before God's fury was poured out upon them, the people would rather hear the message of the false prophets who prophesied everything is well and that God will not punish Jerusalem. God warned them of listening to the false prophets who "speak a vision of their own

heart, *and* not out of the mouth of the LORD” (23:16). God pointed out one such example of their lies when He said: “They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you” (23:17). God, speaking of these false prophets, stated: “They have belied the LORD, and said, *It is* not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine” (5:12). They preached “Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace” (6:14). These false prophets were the greatest hindrance to Jeremiah’s work, as false preachers are today in the work of the Lord.

One of the saddest statements that is found in all of the Old Testament is found in Jeremiah. It speaks of the condition in which Judah found herself: “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?” (5:30-31). The very ones who were to be leading Judah in the ways of righteousness were leading it into unrighteousness. The astonishing thing about it was that the people wanted it that way. Why would the wicked inhabitants of Judah not like it to continue the same way? None of them were correcting their lifestyles, none were condemning their sins, and no one was calling them to repent except Jeremiah.

Many in our day do not want to hear anything that has a negative message attached to it—especially in any sermon that the preacher presents to them. This is nothing new; in Isaiah’s time the people cried to the prophets: “Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10). Paul charged Timothy: “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). Why? Paul went on to say:

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 (4:3-4).

Little has changed since the times of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the apostle Paul. People still want to hear smooth things, preachers to preach falsely, and to have their ears tickled. Jeremiah continued to prophesy only what God told him to prophesy, and Gospel preachers today have the same charge that Paul gave Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (4:2).

God called Jeremiah to “gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them” (Jer. 1:17). Jeremiah was to prepare himself to preach God’s message to the people, and he was not to be afraid for God had made him “a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land” (1:18). That had to be of some comfort to the prophet, understanding the work ahead of him and knowing, for God had told him, that the people would not listen to God’s message that he prophesied. God told him the whole land would fight against him due to his message of “repent or perish.” However, God would be with him and deliver him from all the land.

God is always with His children who take a stand for Him and proclaim His Word, and He will, as He did Jeremiah, prepare us for the rough road ahead. He has given us the spiritual armor to wear “that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). However, He will not put the armor on for us. We must do that; we must “take unto you the whole armour of God” (6:13). God will never do for us what we can do for ourselves. As the song states: “Soldiers of Christ arise and put your armor on; strong in the strength which God supplies...through His beloved Son.”

As Jeremiah was the servant of Jehovah in his day and faced persecution, we must be willing to be soldiers of Christ today even if it means suffering persecution: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). Christians should always be aware that in one form or another “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (3:12). There are more false preachers today than there are faithful ones, but we must continue to preach the Word of God and stand for it. Paul exclaimed: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Jeremiah was an extraordinary man, but only because he would not waver in his duty to Jehovah. God is looking for some extraordinary people today, known as Christians, who will not waver in their duty to Him. It seems in our day and time that such faithfulness truly is extraordinary!

THE TIMES OF JEREMIAH

How can one discuss the man without discussing the times that he lived in? What was Judah like as a nation in Jeremiah’s time? What were the different transgressions in which they were involved? Had they learned anything from the punishment God brought upon the

northern nation of Israel due to their godless ways? Will the United States of America learn from the sins of Israel and Judah or are they doomed to repeat them? Although some of these questions have been touched on previously, it is important to go into more detail to understand exactly what Jeremiah faced at this time. Therefore, let us discuss some of these issues.

First, **what was the nation of Judah like in Jeremiah's time?** Idolatrous! They were idolatrous to such a degree that they would never come back to worship the one true God as they should. God pleaded with them and pleaded with their children's children, asking the question: "Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit" (Jer. 2:11). What a terribly sad and condemning statement about God's chosen people is revealed by the Lord. The Gentile nations had their false gods, but they were loyal and faithful to their false gods and would not abandon them for other gods. Yet, here was Judah who had Jehovah, the one true living God, and they abandoned Him for false gods that would not profit them in any way.

Good king Josiah was known for his efforts to restore righteousness to an ever-increasing unrighteous people; unfortunately, it was a little too late. They would not be able to truly worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Their worship and obedience to God would only be in pretense or for show for their heart was not in it. Josiah's grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon had led the country into wholesale idolatry far too long and the people of Judah seemed to "love to have it so." Keil and Delitzsch aptly state:

Judah's spiritual and moral strength was so broken that a thoroughgoing conversion of the people at large to the Lord and His law was no longer to be looked for. Hence the godly Josiah accomplished by his reformation nothing more than the suppression of the grosser forms of idol-worship and the restoration of the formal temple-services; he could neither put an end to the people's estrangement at heart from God, nor check with any effect that moral corruption which was the result of the heart's forsaking the living God. And so, even after Josiah's reform of public worship, we find Jeremiah complaining: "As many as are thy cities, so many are thy gods, Judah; and as many as are the streets in Jerusalem, so many altars have ye made to shame, to burn incense to Baal" (Jer. 2:28; Jer. 11:13). And godlessness showed itself in all classes of the people (4).

The attitude that Judah displayed of not truly worshiping and being obedient to God has always been a problem with man. This was the attitude of many in Jesus' day, and He condemned them for it:

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honouresth 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. 15:8-9).

This attitude of vain worship is alive and well and even flourishing amongst Christians today. Too many think all they have to do is show up for worship, go through the motions, and they will be saved—even though they live like the devil between times of services. Others are faithful in their attendance, but little else. Faithfulness in attendance is important, but it alone will not save. An outward show of obedience to God is not enough. Obedience comes from within, from the heart that the individual has given completely to God. Paul spoke well of what that involves when he wrote: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). If Judah had lived with that attitude toward God, they would not have been destroyed by Him. Would to God that Christians would live their lives with the attitude that Paul spoke of and acted upon.

Second, **what were the different transgressions of Judah?** Jeremiah 7 gives a list of the sins in which Judah was involved. Jeremiah was to: “Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house” (7:2) and proclaim God’s Word to the rebellious people. Judah’s decision to turn from the one true living God and worship idols would lead them to commit all kinds of other transgressions against God. Solomon well stated: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34). Yet, if Judah had only repented of their ways and turned back to God, He would have allowed them to “dwell in this place” (Jer. 7:3, 7). That would mean they would have to: (1) amend their ways and doings and thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, (2) oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, (3) shed not innocent blood, (4) neither walk after other gods, (5) quit trusting in lying words, (6) stop stealing, murdering, committing adultery, and swearing falsely, and (7) stop burning incense to Baal and walking after other gods (7:5-9).

God was still not finished with Judah. He still had some admonitions for them to heed. Judah had trusted in the temple in Jerusalem that, as long as it was there, God would not punish them. God told them to take a look at what happened to Shiloh. “But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel” (7:12). Years ago the tabernacle, God’s dwelling place, was at Shiloh during a time when wickedness and abuse of God’s worship were prevalent as it was in Jeremiah’s day. God used the ungodly Philistines to punish Israel for their disobedience even though Israel thought that having the Ark of the Covenant would protect them (1 Sam. 4:3). God not only allowed the Ark of the Covenant to be taken by the Philistines, but He also allowed Shiloh to be completely destroyed. God would use the ungodly Babylonians in the same way as He had used the Philistines, and that was to punish His people Judah for their disobedience to Him. So, trusting in the temple on Mt. Moriah would not save them any more than Shiloh saved them in the past. Only a complete turn around from their wicked ways and complete obedience to God would accomplish that.

One of Judah’s greatest sins was the sin of sacrificing their own children to the god Molech in the valley of Hinnom.

And they have built the high places of Tophet, which *is* in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded *them* not, neither came it into my heart (Jer. 7:31).

It never entered into God’s mind to make His people sacrifice their own children to Him as a sign of obedience, and here they were sacrificing their sons and daughters to a false god. Speaking to this unbelievable crime, Matthew Henry states:

This was surely the greatest instance that ever was of the power of Satan in the children of disobedience, and of the degeneracy and corruption of the human nature. One would willingly hope that there were not many instances of such a barbarous idolatry; but it is amazing that there should be any, that men could be so perfectly void of natural affection as to do a thing so inhuman as to burn little innocent children, and their own too, that they should be so perfectly void of natural religion as to think it lawful to do this, nay, to think it acceptable (1023).

The consequences of Judah’s wicked actions would require a punishment that would fit the crime. God records an explanation of the punishment that would be handed down to the rebellious people in Jer-

emiah 7:32-34. The valley's name would be changed from Hinnom to the valley of slaughter. After Babylon conquered the city, this would be the final resting place of many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. So many would be killed and thrown into this valley that the birds of the air and the beasts of the field would freely feed upon the carcasses. No longer would joy or sounds of mirth be heard in the streets of Jerusalem; no longer would men and women be given in marriage, "for the land shall be desolate" (7:34). Terrible sins require terrible punishment, whether in Judah's day or the present.

Judah would never be able to wash the blood of their own children off their wicked hands, and yet this country is guilty of the same sin. Millions of babies in the womb are aborted every year in this country and have been for many years. God makes no distinction between the babe in the womb and the babe outside of the womb. Both are alive in His eyes. Mankind is reminded of this fact in this great book: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (1:5). God knew that Jeremiah would be born and the task ahead of him. Life exists before the birth of a child, it is not some "blob of flesh" or "fetus," as some refer to the child in the womb. Hitler murdered six million Jews; the world calls it a Holocaust and rightly so. Approximately one-and-a-half million unborn babies are murdered every year, and what does this country call it? Pro-choice. Isaiah well said: "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 bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). America can call abortion pro-choice, a woman's right to choose, or anything it wants to call it, but God calls it an abomination. Can or will God ever forgive this country for this unspeakable crime against our own?

Third, **did Judah learn from the sins of Israel?** Maybe the question should be, why did Judah choose not to learn from the transgressions and the punishment that came upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel? Judah's sister to the north, Israel, was carried away into Assyrian captivity approximately in 721 B.C. This was due to Israel's idolatry and wickedness and their stiff refusal to listen to God's prophets that were sent to them, telling them to repent of their ways. Judah at this time was committing the same transgressions Israel had committed, as if they had not learned anything from Israel's actions and subsequent

punishment by God. God even mentions He gave Israel a bill of divorce for her spiritual adultery and then, mentioning Judah, states: “yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also” (Jer. 3:8).

We find another sad statement made against Judah: “And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah” (3:11). What a statement of condemnation by God! This would have been little consolation to Israel for they had already paid the price for their sins, but it shows what God thinks of those who should know better and commit sin anyway (Heb. 10:26-27; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Jam. 4:17). Israel justified herself more than Judah because Judah witnessed the transgressions of Israel and the punishment God handed down to her because of those sins, yet Judah learned nothing. They should have avoided the same mistakes Israel committed, but would not—to their eventual destruction.

Fourth, **will the United States of America learn from the mistakes, sins, and transgressions that Judah committed?** Christians understand more than most the decline in morals that has taken place in the United States. Moral decline is strictly tied to a lack of respect for God and His Word. When a nation turns its back upon God, He has no other choice than to turn His back upon them and their sinful ways. “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” (Hos. 4:6). The Northern Kingdom of Israel paid a heavy price for rejecting God’s Word. The price was destruction of the nation by the Assyrians and captivity in a foreign land. Judah as well paid a heavy price for their rejection of God’s Word by way of the sword and captivity in a foreign land. Judah’s departure from God was so complete, He would not allow Jeremiah to even pray for them: “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee” (Jer. 7:16).

Many in this country have a lack of knowledge of God’s Word, but what is even worse is that many in the Lord’s church have a lack of knowledge of His Word as well. Brethren, a lack of knowledge of God’s Holy Word has never been and never will be an excuse. Simply put, a lack of knowledge is a rejection of that knowledge. If this country does not learn from the past (as the saying goes), we will be doomed

to repeat it. Just because we live in more modern times and have a powerful military does not mean we will be spared. “But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel” (7:12).

RUNNING WITH THE HORSES

“If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and *if* in the land of peace, *wherein* thou trustedst, *they wearied thee*, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” (12:5). Truly this is one of the great passages of Scripture from this marvelous book that continues to speak volumes to us today. God explained to Jeremiah that tougher times were ahead, and they surely were. It would get so bad that his own family would try to incite the people to kill him (12:6). God asks Jeremiah how he would be able to run with horses if he was having trouble running or contending with the foot-soldiers (like those from his own family)? *Horses* would refer to even greater enemies that would try him, like the king, princes, and others in Jerusalem. In other words, how would he hold up when things got much worse and his enemies really tried his faith, when the going really got tough for Jeremiah? As the old saying goes: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” This does not mean that Jeremiah ran from his duty; oh no, he faced it at great personal sacrifice. Jeremiah’s faithfulness to God through the turbulent times leading up to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem is a model for Christians to follow today. Waymon Swain mentioned:

Just as Jehovah taught Jeremiah he must learn to run with the horses, we also must learn this lesson well. In the time of the conspiracy of the priest, the treachery of his own family, the assaults of the false prophets, the plots against his life, the forthcoming imprisonments, and the placement in the miry pit where he would sink in the mire, he proved true to his calling. What a great lesson for us to learn! As Jeremiah was true and faithful to Jehovah, so we must be (337).

Through all of Jeremiah’s trials (most of them were far more difficult than what Christians face today), what can and should we learn from Jeremiah about running or contending with the horses?

First, **running with the horses of apathy**. People in general (and not a few in the church) are apathetic about God’s Word. Most people today do not care about salvation matters. Not only is it difficult to get the non-Christian interested in studying God’s Word, but it is difficult to get the average Christian interested in studying God’s Word—

even though it teaches us: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Preachers complain when brethren do not respond to the Word of God when it is preached week in and week out. Jeremiah preached for little more than forty years, and no one responded. Now that truly is running with the horses of apathy!

Second, **running with the horses of serving two masters.** Too many brethren today want to hold on to the world with one hand and try to hold on to Christ with the other, and that cannot be done. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). Idolatry was one of the sins for which God punished Judah, and it is still a sin for which God will punish Christians. Christians may not worship a stone or wooden god, but anything that comes between us and our God is our idol. The world and all the cares, riches, and pleasures that are found in it can come between us and salvation if we let it. Christians are taught: “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). What master have we chosen to serve?

Third, **running with the horses of compromising brethren.** It has already been mentioned how many churches of Christ no longer “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3). Many congregations have been ripped apart by compromising brethren who will not take a stand for the Truth even though the Scriptures clearly teach one must. Some brethren would rather compromise God’s Word than risk losing members who would take their financial support with them. Are we willing to contend with these brethren, or are we willing to give in to them and compromise God’s Word? Although Jeremiah was by nature a kind and gentle person, that did not stop him from prophesying the Truth. As Jeremiah was courageous not to give into compromising God’s Word, elders, preachers, deacons, and all members must have the same courage to not compromise God’s Word today.

Fourth, **running with the horses of persecution.** Jeremiah was mocked and persecuted for prophesying God’s Word to Judah, and so will be the faithful proclaimer of God’s Word today. However, have Christians faced what Jeremiah faced? He was ridiculed, slapped in the face, threatened with death, thrown into a dungeon and the mire, treated as a traitor, isolated, ignored, and basically ostracized by the

people of his day. Most Christians today are not persecuted like Jeremiah was persecuted. We may be ridiculed and mocked for standing for the Truth, people may talk behind our backs, and preachers may and will be fired at times, but all in all it is not as difficult as the horses of persecution with which Jeremiah had to contend. As Jeremiah stated, we must “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” (Jer. 6:16).

CONCLUSION

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (8:20). This verse seems a fitting conclusion to the nation of Judah. They would reap what they had sown, and the reaping would be in the form of the sword, famine, and pestilence (14:12). God would use Nebuchadnezzar and his army to destroy Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and take a remnant into Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah would be an eyewitness to all of what befell the nation of Judah. Through it all Jeremiah was a faithful servant of God. He proclaimed only what God told him to, and he would not quit or compromise though imprisoned and threatened with death. Would to God we had more men like Jeremiah in the Lord’s church today. The kind of resolve this great prophet of God had within him must be the same kind of resolve Christians are to have. God help us to learn from this great prophet how to stand as unwavering as he did.

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GOD'S COMMISSION TO JEREMIAH

JEREMIAH 1:4-10

Dub McClish

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INTRODUCTION

Few Old Testament characters equal and none surpass the prophet Jeremiah's devotion to Jehovah God (McClish 41-60). His refusal to compromise the message God commissioned him to preach to Jerusalem's stiff-necked apostates in the face of brutal and terrifying persecution is worthy of the grandest admiration and emulation. However, the need for a Jeremiah to prophesy to Judah begins well before his time. Almost fifteen centuries before the birth of our Lord, Jehovah warned Israel through Moses in the following unvarnished terms:

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.... Jehovah will bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, that shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young, and

shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy ground, until thou be destroyed; that also shall not leave thee grain, new wine, or oil, the increase of thy cattle, or the young of thy flock, until they have caused thee to perish. And they shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fortified walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land; and they shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which Jehovah thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, whom Jehovah thy God hath given thee, in the siege and in the distress wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee (Deu. 28:15, 49-53).

Move now some nine centuries later. The once-united nation of God's elect people had been divided. Israel, Judah's sister nation to the north, had already paid her terrible price for rejecting Jehovah, having been destroyed by Assyria a century before. Although she witnessed the national suicide Israel committed through her corruption, Judah seemed to have learned nothing from that tragedy. God would make one last desperate attempt to effect repentance in Judah to avert having to pour out His wrath on His beloved people. If they would not renounce her evils upon this appeal, His forbearance would be exhausted. The instrument through whom He would appeal to them would be a prophet—the stubborn, adamant-willed, unshakable, unbreakable Jeremiah.

Ironically, Jeremiah, the priest of Anathoth, received his call of God in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (cir. 627 B.C.), the most righteous of all of the kings of Judah, including David himself (2 Kin. 23:25). In his reformatory zeal, this young king had already made great progress in destroying idolatry in both Judah and Israel by the time God commissioned Jeremiah for his work (2 Chr. 34:3-7). To the casual observer, it might have appeared that the reforms of Josiah had utterly reformed God's people. Where, then, was the need for Jeremiah's clarion voice to cry out against idolatry and apostasy? Had not Josiah driven it from their borders? Yes, perhaps from the borders of their land, but God knew that it had not been driven from their hearts.

The wickedness that consumed the people had a long history and involved every stratum of Hebrew society. Reaching back for several generations to the early judges not long after Joshua, it prevailed in kings, princes, and priests, and filtered all the way down to the lowliest citizen. Only a few righteous kings were exceptions in Judah. There were exceptions among the kings of Israel. Nations do not escape such long-standing thought and behavioral patterns easily or quickly, if at all. Not merely the hands, but more basically, the hearts of Judah had to

be converted. Josiah's restoration effort was well underway by the time of Jeremiah's call. Josiah exorcized Judah and the remnant of Israel of all of the outward trappings of idolatry. It would be Jeremiah's task to eliminate it from the hearts of the people, for without this accomplishment, the former would be very short-lived, which history reveals was the case.

To learn the essence of God's definition of faithful preachers and preaching we need to return repeatedly to the prophets as our models. No better model among them exists than Jeremiah, both in that which God commissioned him to do and in the way he responded to it. In God's commission to him one can see both the significance of the work to which God called him and the great responsibility which God placed upon him. When one reads Jeremiah's two books, one is struck with the degree to which he comprehended both of these elements of his work. Perhaps it is not too much to say that no mere man ever surpassed his faithfulness in discharging his assigned task, and none ever did so under greater duress, opposition, and suffering. We discover the key to the incomparable work and life of Jeremiah in God's charge to him and his response to it.

EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT

God Appoints Jeremiah—Jeremiah 1:4-5

Jeremiah makes it clear from the beginning that he will not be speaking independently from henceforth. The "word of Jehovah" would hereafter direct and instruct him concerning his words and his works. Note now the elements of God's employment of Jeremiah.

The When of It

In his foreknowledge, God "knew" Jeremiah before he was formed in his mother's womb. Before Jeremiah came forth in birth, God had "sanctified" him. We do not pretend to understand all of the mysteries of the deep subject of God's foreknowledge. However, the Bible unmistakably teaches that God foresees the future, not just in general, but even as it pertains to individuals. What God said to Jeremiah about knowing and selecting him, the Bible also says of David (Psa. 139:13-16), Isaiah (Isa. 49:1, 5), John the Baptizer (Luke 1:15), and Paul (Gal. 1:15).

Whatever is involved in God's election of certain individuals to serve Him in special ways, such predestination does not interfere with

the exercise of their own free will, nor does it determine their eternal destiny (Mat. 11:28-30; John 3:16; Rev. 22:7; et al.). In spite of Paul's selection "from his mother's womb," he persecuted the Lord by persecuting His church in the early part of his life. Had he never turned from this rebellion against God, he would have been lost eternally in spite of God's selection of him. Jeremiah could have utterly rebelled against God's call, in spite of the fact that God desired him to be His spokesman to Judah and to other nations. It was not force beyond his ability to resist—but humility and reverence toward God—that caused Jeremiah to respond to His commission.

The What of It

God first told Jeremiah he "knew" him before he was formed. This term is likely intended to convey to Jeremiah that God had chosen, selected, or approved him for the task to which he was being called. God also told Jeremiah He had "sanctified" him before he was born. This means God had dedicated Jeremiah or set him apart for the holy commission He was now announcing. Furthermore, God had "appointed" Jeremiah to be His spokesman to the nations. The prophetic work of Jeremiah was not assumed by self-appointment. Indeed, we shall shortly see that he shrank from it in his feeling of inadequacy (Jer. 1:6). He had a mandate from God, which must have given strength and courage to the prophet when he had to stand alone as he executed his Divine commission.

Jeremiah Responds to God—Jeremiah 1:6

Understandably, Jeremiah initially appears to be overwhelmed with the task God has laid upon him. He seems to be both alarmed and amazed that God would call such a one as himself for the staggering task of being His mouthpiece, not only to Judah, but to the nations. He protests that he does not have the necessary communication skills. I understand him to mean that he does not have the training or native capacity to stand before princes and multitudes and speak with the fluency God's message deserves. Moses' great reserve and similar excuse when God called him from the burning bush at Sinai immediately comes to mind (Exo. 3:10-4:12).

The reason Jeremiah gives for his inability to speak well is that he is but "a child." This, some suppose, means that he is still a very young man. His long prophetic career (over forty years) would certainly har-

monize with his beginning at a young age. However, he may mean that, compared to the task and the abilities he knew the work would require, he saw himself as no more qualified than a child.

God Answers Jeremiah—Verses 7-8

God Refuses Jeremiah's Excuse

When God told Jeremiah what to do, no excuse was acceptable to avoid the task. What if he were but young and inexperienced? Was this or any other imagined handicap a problem to the Creator of man and his universe? Yet, God does not severely rebuke the fledgling prophet. Perhaps this indicates that God understood that Jeremiah's excuse did not arise from faithlessness, but from meekness, modesty, and understandable fear. What if he were but a "child"? God would still send him to whoever needed to hear him and with whatever message He would give him. He would not have to be concerned about the words, for God would supply them.

A century before Jeremiah, Isaiah described the digression of the leaders of God's people and its terrible consequences: "For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed" (Isa. 9:16). The attitude of the people in general was one of defiance that would not tolerate God's faithful message and messengers:

For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of Jehovah; that say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us (30:9-11).

In his explanation of why Jerusalem and Judah had to be destroyed, the inspired writer of 2 Chronicles described their determination to walk in their own obstinate ways in spite of God's longsuffering attempts to alert them to their peril:

Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy (36:14-16).

It was because of this very human proclivity that God sent Jeremiah to Judah, as the last in a long line of prophets, in a final attempt to rescue her from national suicide. The religious leaders of God's people contemporary with Jeremiah were corrupt, and the people rejoiced that "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. 5:31).

God Reassures Jeremiah

God's promise to deliver Jeremiah implies that he would meet severe opposition. Part of Jeremiah's reluctance may have sprung from his contemplation of the awful treatment to which he would likely be subjected if he preached what Judah and the nations needed to hear. He had every reason to be fearful for his life, even before God gave him his specific message. God encouraged him by telling him not to fear, for He would be with him and deliver him. Jeremiah must have relied upon God's promised protection often as he faced cruel and shameful treatment repeatedly because of his message. God gave an almost identical message of assurance to Paul about six and one-half centuries later when he faced difficult and discouraging circumstances in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10) and again in Jerusalem (23:11). God's words of encouragement were His way of removing every excuse from Jeremiah's mind. It was not for Jeremiah to question his qualifications or his ability to stand before great men with a message they would not appreciate; it was his place to obey and let God take care of the details.

God Equips Jeremiah—Jeremiah 1:9

God had already told Jeremiah that he was to speak whatever He would command him to speak (Jer. 1:7). Now He endows Jeremiah with the very words which he is to proclaim.

Jeremiah's first reaction to God's commission was, "I know not how to speak" (1:6). When Moses offered a similar excuse, God gave him his brother Aaron as his spokesman (Exo. 3:14-16). To help Jeremiah, God said, "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." A century before Jeremiah, God spoke to Isaiah in almost identical terms: "And I have put my words in thy mouth" (Isa. 51:16). God would later do the same with Jeremiah's younger contemporary, Ezekiel. God set a scroll before him which contained the message he was to speak (Eze. 2:8-10). God then commanded the prophet of the Exile to eat the scroll and to

“go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them” (3:1-4).

In Jeremiah we see an instance of that to which the Hebrews writer referred: “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners” (Heb. 1:1). Peter declared the same truth: “For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). The Old Testament prophets of God did not speak their own message, but the words God gave them. Thus, when they spoke, God was speaking to the people. By this means, God also gave us the Old Testament in written form.

God Enables Jeremiah—Jeremiah 1:10

Jeremiah's Authority

While God sent Jeremiah primarily to Judah and Jerusalem and he did almost all of his prophetic work there, his prophecies would relate to other kingdoms and nations as well. In fact, he delivered God's message of doom to at least ten other nations (Jer. 43-51). God said He had set Jeremiah over nations and kingdoms, but this humble priest of Anathoth would not rule by the power of crown, throne, or sword. Rather, he would be *over* the nations to which he would address his prophecies by the power of the Word of God. He would have advance knowledge of their respective fates and futures. This knowledge would be a form of great power and authority, which even the kings of those nations did not possess.

Jeremiah's Authority Implemented

In executing his commission and exercising his authority, his initial work would be that of demolition. This is expressed in four terms: “to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow.” We are not to understand this to be literal or physical destruction, although God was well-pleased with just such behavior in the righteous King Josiah relative to idolatry and all of its evil trappings (2 Kin. 22-23; 2 Chr. 34-35). The demolition to be wrought by Jeremiah was to be through his delivering the message of God's judgment against all wickedness. It would be a bold exposure of the evil and thoroughly corrupt practices of rebellious Jews and Gentiles as well. The Word God gave Jeremiah was like fire, and “like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). Jeremiah was to do his best to level the bastions

and strongholds of idolatry, immorality, and every form of apostasy by speaking the words God had placed in his mouth.

However, his work of destruction was not an end in itself. It was rather preparatory work for the next stage of his assignment—to build and to plant. However, before virtue can take root, evil must be rooted out. The land on which one would plant crops or build a house has to be cleared of trees, stumps, rocks, and other undesirable items before the works of planting or building can be accomplished. The rebuke of wickedness in the absence of repentance was to be followed by the promise of mercy and blessing if the people turned back to God.

APPLICATION OF THE TEXT

Jeremiah 1:4-5

God, not some man, called and commissioned Jeremiah and sent him forth with His message to the people. The various men (such as Jeremiah) whom God commissioned spoke and wrote words that could not have come from men. They often foretold events in great detail that could be known only by One who can see the future as easily and as certainly as if it were the past. There is no explanation for this ability apart from God. The Bible was written by men to whom God gave His message. This is why it is “not...the word of men, but...in truth, the word of God” (1 The. 2:13).

God no longer miraculously calls or commissions men to serve Him, notwithstanding the claims of some. However, He does call us through His Word to serve according to our abilities (Mat. 25:14-30; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:5-10; 1 Pet. 1:17; et al.). We have the same responsibility and accountability to use our God-given and personally cultivated abilities (in harmony with God’s restrictions), as did those who were called in a miraculous way.

The least-observant reader cannot miss the implications of God’s statements about Jeremiah before he was formed and born in relation to the unspeakable tragedy of abortion. Perhaps the favorite ploy of the pro-death advocates is to confuse the issue by arguing that one cannot know when life actually begins in the gestation period. They adamantly argue that it does not begin until sometime after conception. Thereby they attempt to rationalize their bloody work and escape responsibility for their campaign of infanticide. For the Bible-believer, there can be neither question nor equivocation. It is clear from His statements

to Jeremiah that in the mind of God Jeremiah existed in his mother's womb from the time of conception—before his body actually began to take its form!

We should all do all within our power (in keeping with Christian principles) to oppose this incredible barbarism. We should especially take care to use the power of the ballot box to turn those in favor of this indescribable catastrophe out of office and replace them with representatives who will work to ban it. The voices of the more than 50 million innocent and defenseless offspring of United States citizens who have been butchered since *Roe v. Wade* was enacted in 1973, though silenced by the heartless abortionists' vacuum machines, scream at us to rise in their defense. If there were no other evidence to advertise the malignancy of the religion of evolution, the fact that, among other malignant effects, it has brought a once-civilized and generally God-fearing nation to the point of mercilessly slaying its own young almost altogether out of sheer convenience should be sufficient!

Jeremiah 1:6

Some have criticized Jeremiah for his reluctance. Rather than censuring him for his hesitation, ought we not to praise him for his humility and modesty? He was not so much trying to avoid doing what God commanded as he was wondering aloud how, knowing his own limitations, he would ever be able to accomplish it.

There is hardly any character trait that so becomes the personality as humility. This is especially so in preachers. Paul tells us that there were self-centered, ego-filled preachers in the first century (Phi. 1:15), and unfortunately they have not become extinct. Pride is a temptation of special severity to preachers because people often rely upon them for answers to their questions, seek their counsel, and publicly praise them. If he does not take care, a preacher can begin to believe all of those nice things people may write or say about him. (Of course, there seem always to be those whose mission in life is to keep him "in his place.")

Few things are more disgusting to right-thinking people than to see a preacher who is puffed up with his own ability, education, influence, or importance. I am convinced that pride is what has led some to abandon the Truth and adopt the liberal slop of theological pluralism. I am also convinced that some have adopted and continue to propagate strange, quirky heresies to feed a bloated ego that craves extra atten-

tion. Some among us who have attained advanced degrees (many of whom are on the faculties of our schools) look down their *ivory tower* noses at the *unscholarly* fellows who have no more sense than to study and preach the Bible. These self-proclaimed *scholars* are for the most part the leaders in the determined effort to cast the church of our Lord in the denominational mold. In their pride they cannot stand for their denominational academic fellows to accuse them of being “narrow” in their concepts of the inspiration of the Bible, fellowship, the conditions of pardon, the identity of the church, worship, and like subjects.

However, one does not have to be a doctrinal fruitcake, a theological liberal, or someone educated beyond his intelligence (and/or his convictions) to fall prey to pride. Those who are sticklers for sound doctrine can also succumb to this deadly sin. It seems that some preachers are not content to let “cream rise to the top.” Some allow perverse ambition and jealousy to drive them as they openly seek position and prominence that have come to others only through decades of faithful and difficult work. Such behavior is akin to that of a twelve-year old fledgling song leader who tries to lead “The New Song” or of a new convert wanting to begin immediately a study of Revelation before he has dried off from the baptistery. Solomon’s advice is valuable for all, but especially for all who preach: “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; A stranger, and not thine own lips” (Pro. 27:2).

A few years ago a preacher I know reportedly asked some fellow preachers how one went about getting an invitation to speak on “one of those lectureships,” for he would surely like to be on one. As a lectureship director for more than two decades, several men over the years approached me, recommending themselves and offering their services as speakers or writers. I habitually thanked them politely and did not invite them. I have never felt comfortable asking congregations to invite me to preach in Gospel meetings. I have always thought that if they want me to come, they will call me.

Though they may not have a string of degrees after their names or be the greatest orators, those men who preach God’s Truth in humility and at great sacrifice (because they would rather die than compromise it) are nonetheless great in the eyes of God: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mat. 23:12). Jeremiah was just such a man. The proud man says, when charged with great responsibility, “I thought you would

never call.” The humble servant, as Jeremiah, asks, “How can one of such mean ability possibly be equal to the task?” No suit of clothes ever looked better on a Gospel preacher than the suit of humility! Let us cultivate the beautiful and commendable trait Paul enjoined: “For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

An unknown poet wrote:

*How ready is the man to go,
Whom God hath never sent!
How timorous, diffident, and slow,
God's chosen instrument!*

Jeremiah 1:7-8

The essence of God's commission to His uninspired preachers of the Gospel is found in His words to Jeremiah: “for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak” (Jer. 1:7). God's spokesmen must go wherever and to whomever He sends us. Since the Savior did His redemptive work and ascended to His heavenly throne, He has sent His devotees to make disciples of all the nations and to take the saving Gospel into all the world and to the whole creation (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15). This commission will not cease as long as the world stands (Mat. 28:20). We must never flag in our zeal to go with the Gospel.

The prophet of God (whether inspired or uninspired) will speak only and all of what God commands (authorizes) him to speak. If he does not, he is not God's spokesman, whatever he may claim. The majority of men have never been content very long to speak the message of God even as the people have not been willing to hear it.

We see much of the same condition among the people of God now that existed in Jeremiah's time. God's spiritual Israel is cursed with its prophets who prophesy falsely. What began as a whisper over forty years ago from certain radical voices who began labeling the Lord's people as merely another denomination has now grown into a great shout from men of vast influence. These liberal, fellowship-everyone (except those who are set for the defense of the Gospel), denominationally-minded men can be found all over the world. Some of them occupy seats on the boards, fill offices in the administration, and stand

behind lecterns in the classrooms of our schools. They have already poisoned a couple of generations of young people entrusted to them by ignorant, overly trusting, and sometimes naive parents. They occupy editorial chairs and staffs of such papers as *Restoration Quarterly*, *New Wineskins*, and *The Christian Chronicle*.

These religious seditionists serve as elders and occupy the pulpits of some of the largest congregations. In fact, the number of congregations with two hundred members or more that does not have elders and preachers of this kind is few indeed. (It is doubtful that any of these congregations can be turned back from their apostasy.) They are the planners of and speakers on the largest annual gatherings of brethren such as the misnamed Tulsa International Soul-Winning Workshop, Winterfest, and most of the university lectureships. Some of these same men have produced a veritable flood of books over the past ten years, all promoting approximately the same cultic mantra:

1. We are under grace and therefore not under law.
2. To preach obedience to God constitutes legalism.
3. To claim to be the exclusive people of God is Pharisaical and sectarian.
4. We should consider the church of Christ to be only one among the thousands of denominations.
5. We should likewise therefore freely extend fellowship to them as sister entities in the real “church of Christ at large.”

One of the greatest tragedies that those of us who have made overseas preaching trips have observed is that these unscrupulous servants of Satan have not hesitated to export their heresies to faraway places with strange-sounding names. Their effects can be seen in Jamaica, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Russia, Europe, and likely everywhere the Gospel has gone.

While there have always been some who were not content with speaking what the Lord commanded, such men could not have come to places of prominence and power in the church but for two factors. First, at the initial signs of such foolishness, God’s people in general did not rise up in righteous indignation, but sat idly by and allowed this tragedy to happen. This apathy has been partly due to widespread ignorance of God’s Word. As it was with Israel, so it has been with God’s spiritual Israel of our day: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). Many have not recognized even the most grievous

errors because they knew so little of the Truth with which to contrast it. (If one knows not the Truth, he is hardly in a position to detect error!)

This apathy has also sprung from the almost hypnotic influence of the godless humanistic philosophies that brethren have absorbed, urging tolerance toward almost every doctrine and/or practice, whether in morals or religion. Brethren have lost the power and the will to make judgments and to criticize, expose, oppose, and/or refute on the basis of correct judgments. Some can hardly bring themselves to label anything as "sin" or "error." Even now, when God's faithful ones raise the cry of alarm, such cannot be moved. As Jeremiah asked his people concerning the tragedy that had befallen old Jerusalem, we ask our brethren who are even yet nonchalant and unconcerned about the siege of the liberals against the new Jerusalem: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" (Lam. 1:12). Of course, some in the pews have been more than merely apathetic toward liberal teaching and practice; they have recognized, embraced, and encouraged it. They have delighted in having someone twist the Scriptures so as to justify their worldly and immoral lives and their desire to see the church flow into the polluted stream of denominationalism.

Second, the very men God has charged to spiritually feed, oversee, and protect each flock, respectively—its shepherds, pastors—have failed on a grand scale. Both as an elder and as a local preacher, I worked intimately with elders for almost forty years. I appreciate the fact that no group of men on earth has a weightier responsibility than do these men who must account to the Judge of all men for the souls under their care (Heb. 13:17). When preachers, professors, and publications began spouting an ever-increasing flow of liberalism several years ago, these men, more than any others, were in a position to put a stop to it. Some were equal to the task, and every faithful saint admires them. Unfortunately, many were not.

Instead of protecting the flock from the ravaging wolves, they have opened the door and protected the wolves while they fed on the flock. They have provided platforms for the promotion of error and bread for the tables of propagators of apostasy. In some cases, elders were and are eager promoters of liberalism. In other cases, elders have been so ignorant they did not recognize it in their very midst until the church had been stolen from them. In yet other cases, elders recognized the error but were too spineless to deal with it in the face of threats from

congregational bullies. The result has been the same, regardless of the reason—hundreds of churches have been so corrupted that there is no hope for them.

Elders could still isolate and stamp out much of the liberalism that has reached overwhelming proportions in the church. I suggest the following beginning points:

1. Get rid of their liberal preachers and other “staff” members and replace them with men who know and love the Truth and who will teach and preach what the Lord commands without compromise. Then hold up their hands as they do so.
2. Get rid of all of the Bible class material that teaches error. (Much of it sold by our brethren is actually warmed-over denominational material, carelessly edited [if edited at all], with new covers slapped on it. Sweet, 20th Century Christian, and Gospel Advocate have been doing this for years.)
3. Gather up all of the modern speech versions of the Bible from the classrooms and pews and throw them away. Replace them with the King James Version, the American Standard Version, or the New King James Version, and allow only these versions to be used in preaching, teaching, and public reading.
4. Warn the church about liberal periodicals and subscribe to sound periodicals for each family. Also, warn the church about liberal authors and books, and encourage them to buy books written by men and women who are sound in the faith.
5. Warn the church about *Christian* universities that are set on apostasy, and discourage members from sending their children or their money to them. Write the presidents and boards of these schools, telling them you will continue to issue such warnings until they repent.
6. Invite only men whom you know to be sound in the faith to preach in Gospel meetings and to speak on lecture programs.
7. Assign the preacher some sermons that will inform the church of brotherhood controversies and errors. Have him expose the false doctrines and apostasies that are destroying churches on every hand, naming those who are promoting

error so the church may be alert to and aware of such matters.

The suggestions listed above will sound almost as radical to liberal elders and preachers as Jeremiah's message did to the ungodly priests and false prophets of Judah. Alas, I will not hold my breath until elderships begin following this advice (any more than Jeremiah did till Judah repented). Admittedly, to do such would result in a furor in any congregation that has been sliding down the slimy slope of error for some time. Those who have for so long rejoiced over the comfort they have been made to feel in their liberalism and error would register extreme displeasure. No doubt, it would cause church splits all over the land; they would, however, be divisions that not only would please the Lord, but they would be ones He demanded (Luke 12:51-53).

Those in today's very permissive and irrational climate who dare to speak what God commands are not going to win any popularity contests, even as Jeremiah did not. They are going to be mistreated by the very ones who should be upholding their hands and encouraging them, even as Jeremiah was. However, even when sin and error have temporarily triumphed, true servants of God will not compromise the message of God to avoid persecution, even as Jeremiah did not.

Jeremiah 1:9

While God spoke to His people in previous ages by the voices of His prophets, "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4). God sent the Eternal Word in the person of Jesus of Nazareth as His last messenger to mankind: God "hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in *his* Son" (Heb. 1:2). As with Jeremiah, Jesus' message was not His own but that which the Father sent Him to declare: "For I spake not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49; cf. 7:16; 8:26; 14:24). Christ chose, endowed, and sent out His apostles to declare His Gospel to all mankind (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-49; John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). Thus, when they spoke and wrote, it was by Christ's authority (John 13:20) and by Heaven's mandate (Mat. 18:18). It is by this means that "all scripture [New Testament as well as Old Testament (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:15-16)] *is* given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16—KJV). The Holy Scriptures are not the words of men, but the Word of God!

The measure of the message God gave Jeremiah was not in mere broad thoughts or themes: God put His **words** in the prophet's mouth. This passage powerfully sets forth verbal inspiration. The New Testament echoes this Truth loudly: Among other things the Lord promised His apostles was that when they were arrested they would not have to be "anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Mat. 10:19-20). Paul claimed: "we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:13). I am not moved (except to indignation!) by the calumny of the critics, skeptics, modernists, and liberals who say that the doctrine of verbal inspiration constitutes "mechanical dictation" by which the inspired men are rendered mere "stenographers." Let them call it what they may; the Bible teaches that God gave to the inspired men the very **words** He wanted them to speak and write. This is the only way the Scriptures can claim plenary (full, complete in every part) inspiration, which they do (Psa. 119:160; 139:17; John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; et al.). The only way men can fully and faithfully receive and deliver the message of God is to do it in His own words.

Every saint needs to be aware that for quite some time there have been some among us who have snuggled up to the most sneering and blasphemous modernists in their open rejection of the Bible doctrine of verbal inspiration. I cite the following examples, among others:

1. Harold Hazelip, long-time Dean of Harding Graduate School of Religion and Retired President of David Lipscomb University, made the following assessment of the Bible in a Herald of Truth television sermon over thirty years ago: "We are assuming that it [the Bible] is the inspired word of God, though this certainly is also an area in which we should be open to whatever facts are pertinent. Any observer of religion is aware that our problem is a legitimate one" (qtd. in "How Are" 7).
2. John T. Willis, teacher in the religion department of Abilene Christian University, affirms: "the Bible contains the word of God, but not ordinarily or absolutely as it is ordinarily read" ("Men" 807). He further opines: "There is no way to prove or disprove this claim [i.e., inspiration] absolutely, al-

though arguments have been advanced on both sides of the issue [emph. DM]" (*World* 11).

3. According to Rubel Shelly, Luke wrote his Gospel account from information he gathered after interviews with the Lord's associates and visits to various historical sites, from Mark's book, from an imaginary document called "Q," from preaching he heard, and from "scraps" ("Church"). Modernistic critics of the Bible have long taught just such infidelity. Did you know that the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7) is also a compilation of "scraps"? (Cates 28).
4. Carroll D. Osburn, retired professor of the religion faculty of Abilene Christian University, ridicules the idea of verbal, plenary inspiration as "naive" and calls it "fundamentalism." He seems amused that any would advance the view that truth in the Bible extends to scientific, historical, and geographical teachings, as well as those on morals and religion. Amazingly, he then has the audacity to deceptively label himself a "conservative" in spite of his denial of the Scriptures' claims for themselves. He debunks the idea that one can really understand the Bible by studying the King James Version (58, 62-62). Osburn believes the origin of Jude's letter lies shrouded in obscurity but that it relies heavily upon several books of the "Jewish apocalyptic" in the Apocrypha (94, 107-113).
5. The late Dowell Flatt was Chairman of the Bible Department when our son, Andy, was a Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University (1985-1989). He had to argue the case for the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 in one of Dowell's classes, for Dowell argued that it was not authentic. It has become public knowledge since from some of Flatt's former students that he was teaching the old modernistic and mythical "Q" documentary hypothesis. Winford Claiborne (one of Dowell's fellow-teachers in the Bible Department for several years) stated to me in a phone conversation on November 4, 2002, that "there is no doubt that" Dowell taught this heresy. Furthermore, I have a copy of the class notes Flatt distributed to his students that verify this fact. So we had a Bible Department Chairman who taught a heresy concerning the

source of at least three of the Gospel accounts and denied the authenticity of a major section of one of those accounts. We also had an administration that tolerated the Chairman of its Bible Department who taught these grievous errors. Flatt suffered a complete emotional breakdown at one point and was forced to take an extended leave of absence. Earl Edwards was appointed in his place. When Flatt was recovered, Edwards rehired him as a teacher, and when word of Flatt's errors began to be circulated in 2002, Edwards forcefully defended Flatt, denying that he held or taught such doctrines.

Such men should be ashamed to pretend to be teachers of the Word of God, while not even believing the Bible is the Word of God in the sense that it claims to be.

It is amazing almost beyond comprehension that many men go on portraying themselves as *Gospel preachers* when they no longer (1) accept God's Word as being from Him, (2) will preach it and it alone to lost men, and (3) believe there is only one body, one faith, and one baptism. When men who profess to preach and teach the Bible as God's Very Word lose their faith, they should either repent or quit. Simple honesty demands that they quit destroying faith while supposedly engaging in the work of building it up. Rubel Shelly, one of the most serious offenders in this respect for twenty-five years (since 1983), wrote (in his rational early years) a powerful article titled: "Oh, for an Honest False Teacher." His comments in this article on the false teachers who left the church (per 1 John 2:19) are words he has long needed to apply to himself. He wrote so truly, as follows:

Can anything good be said about such apostates as these? Yes! They were honest.... Surely we can have more respect for a man who is honest and open about his convictions (or lack of them) than for a man who no longer believes the basic doctrines of the gospel but seeks to stay within the body of believers as a subversive. Such a person is not only a heretic Christian, he is a dishonest man.... Let them [college professors, preachers, Bible class teachers, et al.] be honest enough to break with us openly and quit their unmanly treason (382-84).

How this man (and those like him who have lost their faith) can look at himself in the mirror every morning and live with himself after writing the statement above is more than I can understand. I recommend that he change his name to **Rebel Shelly**, for this is what he has been in relation to sound doctrine for a quarter of a century.

Jeremiah stands as a model for Gospel preachers in that he was content to preach only the words which God gave him, and he did so faithfully in spite of the almost universal rejection of his message and terrible opposition and persecution. Each generation has the obligation to receive only the Word of God, to obey it, and to pass it and it alone on to the next generation so it can do the same thing all over again until the Lord comes (2 Tim. 2:2).

Jeremiah 1:10

God's empowerment of Jeremiah is instructive concerning the nature of the preaching He wants His preachers to do. For several years now we have been hearing outcries from some brethren against *negative* preaching. By this they mean preaching that opposes, exposes, rebukes, reproves, condemns, judges, or corrects. (It is somewhat humorous that they see no inconsistency in their own *negative* preaching against "negative preaching.") I suppose that if they had their way, no preacher would ever stoop so low as to identify any specific sin or error. To them it is next to blasphemy to dare call the name of a false teacher and expose his false doctrine. One thing is certain—were Jeremiah to be resurrected, they would not tolerate him in their pulpits more than once.

In emphasizing the need for and place of the negative element in preaching, we do not want to lose sight of the need for *positive* preaching. Jeremiah was to do this kind of preaching, also. To be fair, there are some who do not seem comfortable with anything but a strong *negative* sermon every time. (This is an extreme as erroneous as the former, but it seems that the criticism of negative preaching is far more prevalent than its opposite.) We not only need to hear sin and error exposed. We also need to hear preaching from the Word of God that encourages, enlightens, and edifies our hearts and spirits. This is the "building" and "planting" Jeremiah was to do and that preachers today still must do. If one preaches only a negative message all of the time, his preaching is single-dimensional and incomplete. However, the trend among preachers in the Lord's church over the past several years has definitely favored a "positive only" approach. With this approach has come a corresponding rate of apostasy due to liberalism.

It was surely not accidental that God used four *negative* terms, but only two *positive* terms, to describe the preaching Jeremiah was to do. It is surely not a mere coincidence that Paul used the same ratio

of *negative* and *positive* terms to describe the kind of preaching Gospel preachers are to do: “preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). Is God trying to tell preachers that they need to spend twice as much time uprooting evil as planting Truth, or that exposing sin and error is twice as important as imparting the Gospel, or something besides these? Perhaps we will never know for sure. However, what we can most certainly learn is that the namby-pamby, soft-soap, toothless preaching that some brethren want exclusively does not represent God’s standard.

Where did anyone ever come up with the ideas of “negative” and “positive” preaching in the first place? It certainly was not from the Bible. When we hear a man preach, it should never cross our minds to judge the lesson as *negative* or *positive*. Only one question deserves any consideration at all—is it biblical, scriptural? If so, why should anyone care whether it fits someone’s subjective definitions of *negative* or *positive*? As a matter of fact, any sermon that expounds the Truth on any subject will be both “negative” **and** “positive.” In the process of setting forth what the Bible teaches, there is implicit condemnation and exposure of teachings of men that contradict the biblical message. Likewise, when it is necessary to devote a sermon to exposing some given sin or error, there is the positive effect of making us stronger in the Truth and helping prevent us from falling into some error or sin.

The sad fact is that the church at the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century contains a large and growing number of congregations that does not want and will not long tolerate a preacher who preaches what the Bible plainly says on a host of subjects and who takes longer than twenty minutes to do so. By their own foolish and carnal requirements, they would not knowingly let Jeremiah (to say nothing of John the Baptizer, Paul, Stephen, or even the Lord Himself) within ten miles of their pulpits. The super-sweet, ooey-goey, touchy-feely, pasted-smile, story-telling, stage-prancing, after-dinner-speaker type *preachers* are much in demand nowadays. They are being supported, rewarded, and promoted by congregations that languish in biblical beriberi and spiritual scurvy. Like Laodicea of old, they are so blind and ignorant they are incapable of seeing their woeful condition (Rev. 3:17-18). At the same time, good men who love the Lord and His Truth more than life and who, as Jeremiah did, will

preach it regardless of the cost or persecution, are encountering more and more difficulty in finding congregations that desire or will long endure their services.

CONCLUSION

Let us summarize and re-emphasize some major points: God is “pro-life” concerning infants in the womb—and we had better be. Jeremiah’s reticence to respond to God’s commission is an attractive sign of humility. The arrogant seek to push themselves into places of prominence. Humble folk attempt to do God’s bidding, all the while thinking themselves unworthy. God’s preachers must go where He sends and speak only and all of what He bids them speak. Those who do otherwise are not God’s preachers, regardless of how many academic degrees, how much popularity, how prestigious a position, or how handsome a salary they may possess or command. God’s preachers must not fear what men will do unto them. If they do, they will not long be God’s preachers (Gal. 1:10).

We must serve God faithfully and trust Him to deliver us from evil men. Jehovah has put His words in our “mouths” by giving us His completed revelation, and we dare preach nothing more or less than this. God sends His preachers to upbraid evil and error wherever it is found, whether in university presidents, elders, deacons, the families of elders or deacons, our own families, those who are financially or politically powerful in the church, or those immoral segments of society who might threaten us with bodily harm for rebuking them. God also sends His preachers to sow the kingdom’s seed so new growth and strengthening of old growth may occur.

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BROKEN CISTERNS

JEREMIAH 2:13

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INTRODUCTION

“**F**or my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13).

Jeremiah was preaching to a wicked and rebellious people, a people whose hearts were hardened to the truth, whose eyes they had closed, whose ears they had stopped, and who were openly averse to the right. He was not preaching to atheists or agnostics; he was not preaching to pagans; he was not preaching to a pre-Christian form of denominationals—no, he was preaching to those who would be counted the people of God and were, indeed, the people of God—albeit in apostasy. Jehovah used many illustrations to drive home His point to His hard-hearted and hardheaded people, the one used as our title being in that number.

As the historical information is well established elsewhere in this volume, we shall dispense with that and move to the consideration of the topic assigned us. The Jews were herein charged with “two evils”: turning their backs on (forsaking) God, and trusting in a false religion (hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water). They had trusted in false gods, forged their own way, established their own religion based on their own authority, and in many other ways left the only true religion headed by the only True God Who alone could actually translate their religion into salvation.

At all costs we must avoid their errors! Let us spend the time allotted us considering religion: true religion and false religion, with a view

to avoiding their pitfalls and practicing the religion nourished by the “fountain of living waters.” If you intend to be religious, be right religiously. It has often been said (but can stand saying again), Jesus did not come into the world to make men religious, but to make men right religiously. Men were religious for thousands of years prior to His advent. How can we be right religiously? What is the difference between true religion and false religion?

TRUE RELIGION

True religion is oft discussed in and defined by the Scriptures, consider:

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul (Deu. 10:12).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man (Ecc. 12:13).

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6).

He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Mic. 6:8).

And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love *his* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33).

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).

We have many examples of piety to which we may turn for inspiration, for example:

Enoch

And Enoch walked with God: and he *was* not; for God took him (Gen. 5:24)

Noah

These *are* the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God (6:9)

Jabez

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep *me* from evil, that it may

not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested (1 Chr. 4:10)

Hezekiah

And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought *that which was good and right and truth* before the LORD his God (2 Chr. 31:20)

Job

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil (Job 1:1)

Daniel

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (Dan. 6:10)

Simeon

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him (Luke 2:25)

Anna

And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day (v. 37)

Nathanael

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! (John 1:47)

Jesus

And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (8:29)

Cornelius

A devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway (Acts 10:2)

Barnabas

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord (11:24)

Ananias

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt *there* (22:12)

Timothy

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (2 Tim. 1:5).

Sincerity is a requisite mark of true religion. Indeed, insincerity is the very antithesis of all that is true with respect to religion! Consider:

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD (Jos. 24:14).

Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8).

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward (2 Cor. 1:12).

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (2:17).

That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ (Phi. 1:10).

In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine *shewing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity (Tit. 2:7).

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18).

FALSE RELIGION

False religion, in its many and varied manifestations, is characterized in many ways:

Ceremonialism

And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables (Mark 7:4).

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:10).

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? (Gal. 4:9).

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (5:1).

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? (Col. 2:20-22).

Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed *on them* until the time of reformation (Heb. 9:10).

False Professions

And they remembered that God *was* their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues (Psa. 78:35-36).

Fervent lips and a wicked heart Are *like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross (Pro. 26:23—ASV).

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee *as* my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, *but* their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou *art* unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not (Eze. 33:31-32).

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).

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me (Mark 7:6).

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Tit. 1:16).

False religion is characterized by legalism:

And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? (Mark 2:24).

And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? (Luke 6:2).

And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day (13:14).

The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed (John 5:10).

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek (16:3).

And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law (21:20).

I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day (22:3).

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2).

And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers (Gal. 1:14).

Sanctimony

This is an outward show of righteousness with no real substance.

Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God (Isa. 58:2).

Pharisaic Separation

Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day (Isa. 65:5).

Assumed Innocence

Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned (Jer. 2:35).

Religious Display

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward (Mat. 6:5).

Formalism

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting (Isa. 1:13).

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men (29:13).

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Mat. 23:23).

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain (Gal. 4:10-11).

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (Col. 2:20).

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 3:5).

The Bible often sets forth the insufficiency of formalism:

And Samuel said, 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 (1 Sam. 15:22).

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psa. 51:16-17).

Keep thy foot firm when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil (Ecc. 5:1).

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6).

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17).

Hypocrisy

It has been a problem in every generation of God's dealings with men, as the following warnings against and condemnations of hypocrisy indicate.

For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee (Pro. 23:7).

When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for *there are* seven abominations in his heart (26:25).

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Mat. 23:28).

In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (Luke 12:1).

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2).

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Tit. 1:16).

The Scriptures give us many examples of hypocrisy:

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying (Mat. 15:7).

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, *ye* hypocrites? (22:18).

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in (23:13).

And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (24:51).

Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye (Luke 6:42).

Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? (12:56).

The Lord then answered him, and said, *Thou* hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or *his* ass from the stall, and lead *him* away to watering? (13:15).

This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein (John 12:6).

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. 16:18).

THERE IS GREAT INCONSISTENCY IN FALSE RELIGION— AT ITS VERY BEST IT IS OF BUT LITTLE COMFORT IN THIS WORLD AND OF NO USE AT ALL IN THE NEXT.

A false religion is subject to inconsistency:

Uncharitableness

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (Mat. 7:3).

Religious talk

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

Harsh judgment

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things (Rom. 2:1).

Preaching and not practicing

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? (2:21).

False professions

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Tit. 1:16).

Selfishness

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? (Jam. 2:15-16).

Inconsistency brings reproach upon the cause of Truth:

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).

Also I said, It *is* not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? (Neh. 5:9).

And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These *are* the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land (Eze. 36:20).

Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written (Rom. 2:23-24).

CONCLUSION

What have we to learn from the false religion condemned by Jehovah so long ago? Is it not that, as it was wrong then to follow any but Him, so it is now? What, or who, stands now between us and Him with Whom we have to do?

WORK CITED

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

PEACE WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE

JEREMIAH 6:14

David P. Brown

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The noun *peace* means:

1: a state of tranquillity or quiet; as **a:** freedom from civil disturbance **b:** a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom <a breach of the *peace*> **2:** freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions **3:** harmony in personal relations **4 a:** a state or period of mutual concord between governments **b:** a pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war or in a state of enmity **5**—used interjectionally to ask for silence or calm or as a greeting or farewell—**at peace:** in a state of concord or tranquillity (“Peace” *Dictionary*).

Related Words accord, amity, concord, harmony; calm, quiet, serenity, tranquillity (*or* tranquility); order, stability; pacification **Near Antonyms** conflict, contention, discord, dissidence, strife, trouble; tumult, turmoil, unrest, upheaval; fighting, warfare; action, battle, combat **Antonyms** war (“Peace” *Thesaurus*).

According to Strong, the Hebrew word translated “peace” in Jeremiah 6:14 is *shalom* (shawlome); or *shalom*, “the prime root; *to be safe* (in mind, body or estate)” (116-17).

Therefore, this chapter is concerned with spiritual peace—how discord between God and man can be replaced with peace, spiritual tranquillity, concord, and harmony, resulting in a *safe* relationship with God in *mind, body, or estate*. However, as indicated by the chapter title,

we are primarily interested in those who tell us that everything is harmonious with God and man, when in reality concord does not exist between the two. Emphasized here is the fact that a false peace with God is created by believing and obeying false doctrine (lies). It is the false teacher who teaches the false doctrine that when believed produces the false peace or safety in the person who believes it.

We need to learn or be reminded that there is no other way for man to separate himself from God except by sinning against Him (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17). Of every person who is accountable to God, Paul wrote that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” and that “the wages of sin *is* death” (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Thus, in saving man from sin, the following question had to be answered: **How can God, who is completely, flawlessly and eternally just, forgive man’s sins while remaining just, seeing that pure justice demands punishment for any and all sin?**

Eternal and profound thanks are extended to a loving and all-wise God, who, through Jesus Christ, solved the sin problem. Note what Paul wrote on this matter to a Gentile church:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:13-22).

“Peace” translates the Greek word *eirene*. Of the word, Strong says it is from the verb “*eiro*. meaning (to *join*); peace (lit. or fig.); by impl. *prosperity*:—one, peace, quietness, rest, +set at one again” (25). Thus, the Hebrew and Greek terms carry the same fundamental meaning.

Because the Second Person of the Godhead (the eternal Word) became flesh (He took upon Himself the form of man, a servant—becoming Jesus Christ of Nazareth), was tempted in every point as

Satan tempts or solicits man to sin, He, therefore, became the sinless sacrifice to be offered for the forgiveness of man's sins (John 1:1, 14; Phi. 2:7-8; Heb. 1:3; 4:15; 5:8; 7:26-27). When He died on the cross in the place of sinful man (a vicarious death), in actuality He became the Savior of mankind—He tasted death for every man (Isa. 53; Heb. 2:9). Thereby, God's justice (which demanded the punishment of man for his sins against Him) was satisfied (Isa. 53:11). This is how God remains just and can forgive man's sins without any contradiction in Himself. Therefore, when one believes in Christ based on the teaching of the Gospel, repents of sin, confesses faith in Christ as the Son of God, and is baptized into Christ's death for or unto the remission of sins, the saving blood of Christ is applied and the obedient person is forgiven of any and all past sins (Rom. 10:17; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 1:16; 6:3-4, 17-18; Col. 2:12; Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21). Thus, through an obedient faith, all alien sinners become recipients of God's saving grace (Eph. 2:8-10; Jam. 2:17, 20, 22, 24, 26; Acts 10:47-48; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:3; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 3:21), faithfully serving God in His Son's church to which Christ adds every person He saves. It is the blood of Christ, first applied to a person in the waters of baptism to take away his alien sins, that continues to cleanse faithful children of God from their sins (Acts 2:38, 41, 42, 47; 1 John 1:7-8).

We must emphasize that our Lord through His Gospel offers man the only way for him to make peace with God (John 14:6; Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 41-42, 47). This means that we must stress the Lord's plan of salvation. For emphasis we say again, to the believer in Christ who has repented of sins and confessed faith in Christ as the son of God, we must underscore the fact that to be saved or get **into** Christ where God has located "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," one must be immersed in water for the remission of sins. Water baptism is the **only** doorway into Christ (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:26-27; Mark 16:16; Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:3-4, 17-18). It is the one baptism noted by Paul in Ephesians 4:5. Thus, obedience to the previous enumerated plan of salvation is the only way peace is achieved between man and God. Anything more or less is not acceptable to Him and will leave one in a state of enmity with God. This is the case because such a person remains disobedient and, thus, guilty of sin.

As previously noted, once we are baptized into Christ, for us to live the Christian life, we must consistently and steadfastly live according to the teaching of the New Testament of Christ (1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10; John 12:48). To depart in word or deed from the teaching of Christ and/or remain in fellowship with those who have departed from such, is to cause a child of God to lose his salvation—to be once again at enmity with God and in a worse state than prior to one's obedience to the Gospel (Gal. 5:4; 2 John 8-10; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 10:26-30). Therefore, **those remaining faithful to Christ dare not extend fellowship to those who are outside or have fallen out of fellowship with Christ.** On the other hand, the faithful of God **must not** withhold fellowship from any church member who remains in fellowship with God. Biblical unity demands the previously explained approach in determining who is in and who is out of fellowship in the church. First, there must be obedience to the truth of the Gospel. Second, thereby fellowship with God becomes a reality. Third, fellowship with others who are in fellowship with God is extended. And, fourth, the unity of those in fellowship with God and one another is accomplished.

In pursuing our study, let us realize that it is in mankind's human nature to diligently seek after peace. However, most people look for peace in all the wrong places: good physical health, money, possessions, comfortable situations, their family/friends, pleasant surroundings, and anything else that pertains to this present world whereby material security is found. Further, we enjoy listening to those who offer peace to us. Thus, if at all possible, we avoid whatever and whoever disrupts our peaceful habitations—our cherished comfort zones.

With most people who seek spiritual peace and contentment the previous mind-set does not change. In fact, in many cases, opposition to things, persons, and doctrines we perceive to be threatening to our spiritual peace is far more pronounced than whatever deprives people of their material comforts alone. Therefore, when such people perceive both their spiritual and material peace to be endangered, the conditions conducive for war are born.

The Jews in Jeremiah's day fell victim to their own longings for peace—a **peace at any price, looked for in the wrong way and in the wrong places.** This was a peace that God never promised them (Deu. 30:15-20). Although there were individual exception, as a nation they failed to learn that their peace was to come from steadfastly

adhering to God's Will in all facets of life. They expressed a desire for the peace that God could provide, but they wanted it without faithfully obeying Him. This was their downfall. Thus, it has always been for the great majority of those who claim to be servants of God. In Jeremiah's day the consequences of the Jews long-practiced rebellion against God caught up with them—their fall as a nation was imminent. With the dread of war pressing upon their individual and collective Jewish minds, their strong desire for peace at any price, and their false belief that God would not punish them for their sins, their minds became fertile soil for seduction. Into that soil the wicked prophets sowed their seeds of false hope, which error gave birth to a false sense of security in the people—a pseudo peace.

Although they may not appear to be, wicked people are in a constant state of mental turmoil, but because they love their vices, they seek a panacea that does not require them to change their erroneous beliefs and actions. Adeney writes the following cogent remarks concerning the false teachers' success in selling their message to the hard-hearted people.

II. THE PRETENSIONS OF FALSE PEACE ARE PLAUSIBLE. The prophets dissuaded their hearers from attending to the warning words of Jeremiah, and endeavored to make them believe that they were in no danger. There is much that is very popular in arguments such as theirs.

1. They agree with the *wishes* of the hearers. Men are always inclined to believe what they wish.

2. They flatter the *pride* of the populace. The people are told that they are too great and too favored of Heaven to suffer any serious calamity, and they are only too ready to believe it.

3. They claim the merits of *charity*. They promise pleasant things. This looks more charitable than the threatening language of stern censors. Hence the prophets win favor for their apparent geniality and liberal sentiments.

4. They require *no sacrifices* from those *who* accept them. The doctrine is popular because the practice flowing from it is easy. The flattering prophets called to no reformation of character.

5. They have *appearances* in their favor. At present all looks fair. Is not this a presumption that the future will be happy? The sun is rising in gold and crimson; why, then, prophesy the approach of a storm?

III. THE PRETENSIONS OF FALSE PEACE ARE RUINOUS.

1. These pretensions do *nothing to secure* the peace. They simply lead men to believe that they are to enjoy it. Such a belief cannot alter facts. If there is no peace we do not make peace by crying, "Peace, peace!" This is the language of folly and indolence.
2. These delusions only *aggravate the danger*. They prevent men from preparing for the calamity by blinding them to the near advent of it. (11:150)

Thus, the false prophets gained their influence with the Jews of the time because they appealed to their natural desire for peace at any price—**they told them what they wanted to hear**. They were the prophets who possessed the "irenical spirit," the positive message, "the loving disposition," and they satisfied the "felt needs" of the people. How **balanced** they must have appeared to a gainsaying, backsliding, and rebellious people. The combination of the false prophet's message and the people's desire for it produced in the people **a false peace**.

Is it possible for the Lord's church to remain at peace with God and escape the delusion of the false peace that permeated the Jews of Jeremiah's day? If the members of the church retain the same honesty of heart, desire for and obedience to the Truth of God's Word that put them into Christ in the first place, then certainly the brethren will remain faithful—no matter the issues that arise that must be confronted with the Truth or the persecution heaped upon them because they serve God (Luke 8:15; Mat. 5:6; John 7:17; Rom. 6:17-18). But, in reality, all too often that does not happen.

In the Divine organization of the Lord's church, God has authorized scripturally-qualified men to serve as elders. These men are charged with shepherding the flock of God. They are charged with faithfully working to keep the church true to God's Word in faith and practice. They are also responsible for seeing that the obligations God has authorized the church to discharge are accomplished in the quickest and best way possible. Thus, elders are to make sure that only faithful preachers occupy the pulpit and that only godly persons are chosen to teach Bible classes. But sadly in many cases unqualified men are put into the eldership, or those who are scripturally qualified fail to learn what the work of elders is, or they refuse to do the work God has ordained them to do. Thus, they are derelict in their duty to God regarding their work in superintending Christ's church; thereby, God's children lose their viability as the Lord's church. In time, because of their failure, the church weakens and finally ceases to be the church that is of, by, and for Jesus

Christ to the glory of God the Father and the salvation of the souls of men. Thereby an evil foundation is laid for the church to become only another human institution void of any spiritual good. In fact, it only becomes another road to hell.

The love for the Truth, the honest and good hearts of the members, and sound doctrine (as the Bible defines and uses these terms) are the only things that can produce Christians and truly faithful churches of Christ. Do elders demand that preachers preach sound doctrine, or do they merely tolerate it and not too much of it? All too often it is the latter route that elders and churches take, if not a total repudiation of doctrinal preaching.

We do not hesitate to say that in most cases, **as the pulpit goes, so goes the Lord's church**. Preachers and elders must take seriously the following words written to Timothy by the apostle Paul:

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 (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

If the church is to remain at peace with God, it is imperative that we preach and defend the whole Counsel of God (thus, any component part of it) without apology to anyone in or out of the church. We must do it now while there are those brethren who continue to hunger and thirst after it. If we fail in this great work, we will see the time come when people will not tolerate the doctrine of Christ. Sadly, in many churches that time came some time ago.

For many years we have given special attention to the observations of seasoned brethren (preachers and otherwise) who have expressed their concerns regarding more and more churches that have rejected not all of the Truth but various component parts or constituent elements of the Truth. Coupling their observations with my own experiences, the one dominant concern that continually comes to the forefront is the low caliber of preaching coming from our pulpits and the church members who either desire it or do not see it for what it is. We heard of a brother who expressed what is all too often coming from many pulpits: "I am getting tired of going to Gospel meetings and hearing *fluff*." He went on

to explain what he meant by *fluff*—preaching that contained very little real Bible teaching that set out the distinctiveness of New Testament Christianity.

Most of us are familiar with cotton candy. As a child, I remember that I would buy cotton candy on a stick. It was spun and displayed so as to make me think that I was getting a lot more than I actually did. I soon learned that I had bought mostly very sweet *fluff*—a little very sweet candy inflated with a lot of air. This is what I mean by preaching that is basically *fluff*.

Max Lucado is one of the most notorious proliferators of spiritual *fluff* in the religious world today. His books are *fluff*-filled, but they sell by the tens of thousands. It is a sad commentary on the spiritual caliber of the people that they crave his books, and the religious bookstores are filled with writers who are the purveyors of this spiritual *fluff*. For the most part there is no spiritual depth to Lucado's works; the same is true concerning the people who read them. Such books are composed of a little very sweet candy and blown up with a lot of hot air.

Among other things, the popularity of Lucado's books serves to indicate to what a low and sad spiritual level people have sunk in the last 40 years. Lucado and his readers are intellectually and spiritually shallow. There is simply no substance to Lucado. His readers are primarily emotionally motivated, and further, they are subjective and relative in their approach to solving problems and in dealing with what little Bible they read. They are troubled with all kinds of sins, but they are unwilling to change their lives by disciplining themselves to live within the confines of the perfect law of liberty—**God's only absolute objective standard of conduct for all mankind** (Jam. 1:25; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 12:48). They are unwilling to engage in self-discipline so they can conduct themselves according to God's Will. However, they want (and fully expect) God's blessings on them, although they continue to live on the sensual and low level of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17; Col. 3:5-16). These are they who hunger for Lucado's sugar and hot air as they seek a *feel good*, "I'm okay, your okay" religion. In reality, such pitiful people are rushing headlong into eternal destruction as members of (to borrow a phrase from the late comedian Flip Wilson) "The Church of What's Happening Now." As long as churches demand spiritual cotton candy to take the place of (or to be intermingled with) the doctrine of Christ, there

will be those who are happy to be paid large sums of money to spin it out to them. Of course, all such *sweet preaching* is done to satisfy many church members' spiritual *sugar highs* in a pseudo peace.

How sad it is that sermons and classes with real doctrinal content are held in disfavor and even derided by many of today's churches. The demand is for more *relevant*(?) matters. Themes more suited for psychologists and sociologists are replacing basic Bible topics. Topics that address so-called "real problems" and "real-life concerns" of "today's Christian" are replacing those that deal with what the Book says about man's basic spiritual problem—sin, and his basic needs—conviction of sin and the salvation of his soul through obedience to the Gospel. Lectures aimed more at enhancing man's present happiness and welfare on earth than ensuring his eternal well-being are by far the most widely received. Preachers that entertain and make brethren feel good about themselves rather than producing godly sorrow leading to repentance, or any real depth of scriptural knowledge, are given the most favored status among brethren. Sermons that really teach the Bible are considered "uninteresting," "too-structured," and even "crude" by some. All too often preachers who resort to such are asked to find someplace else to do their preaching. We have observed an epidemic of this spiritual disease lately.

Subjects more suitable for secular or sectarian denominational seminars of every description, rather than for Gospel meetings, wherein "cotton candy" is expected and even demanded by many members of the church of Christ are declared. To them, the preaching of the pristine Truth of God's Word sounds strange, unloving, and harsh. For many years now on the first day of the week in many churches warmed over denominational soup is dished up and passed to the members for their consumption as if it was truly the Gospel of Christ. This is a sure and proven way for destroying church members' spiritual appetite for sound doctrine. Thereby there is created a false peace or sense of security among them; thus, the door is wide open for the speakers of fables. As one said, motivational hype and emotional manipulation in many places today constitute the modern concept of what Gospel preaching is, but in *cotton candy* churches they think such is Gospel preaching. These so-called "dynamic speakers" will never produce well-grounded members who are sound in the faith. In reality they produce the opposite of faithful members of the church.

True Gospel preaching is a combination of reproving, rebuking, and exhorting the brethren as the whole counsel of God is preached to Christian and alien sinner alike. This is what Paul meant when he said as much in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Timothy 4:1-2. It is book, chapter, and verse preaching that applies the Truth of God's Word to today's circumstances, situations, and problems (2 Tim. 2:2). This is the kind of preaching that causes the listener to meditate deeply on the message as it is applied to one's own life. The motivation for the hearer to act is in the meaning of the message as it reasons with the listener of righteousness, temperance (self-control), and judgment to come (Acts 24:25; Isa. 1:18; Heb. 4:12). Once convicted of one's spiritual needs by the Truth of the lesson(s) found in the sermon, the hearer is motivated to act rationally and deliberately in obedience to the Gospel message preached. Only then does one act on the basis of the power of the Gospel message, rather than on the personal, emotional, dynamic, and oratorical powers of the man preaching.

In recent years, we have heard much about "balanced preaching." By many it is being defined and advocated in a way that is contrary to what the Bible teaches concerning it. According to certain prominent brethren, certain institutions (such as Memphis School of Preaching, et al.) are to be allowed to determine which errors should be exposed and refuted and which ones should be ignored. "Balanced preaching" to these brethren means ignoring their friends' sins—Dave Miller and Stan Crowley, those who fellowship them, their financial supporters, or those involved in certain favorite brotherhood projects such as Apologetics Press and Gospel Broadcasting Network. They have no problem fellowshipping error if those who are being fellowshipped are *in* with their circle of influence. Contrary to this hypocrisy—and that is exactly what their policy and conduct is—Lynn Parker wrote the following concerning biblically "balanced preaching:"

Balanced preaching will cover the negative and the positive, the error and the right. It will tear down sin, and build us up in righteousness. It will afflict those who are comfortable in sin, and comfort those afflicted by trial and tribulation. Effective, sound preaching will make those in sin uncomfortable or contrite. They will either repent or get mad. Remember that for some folks, even one sermon refuting error is one too many—it just really irritates them. So what should preachers do? Preachers should take a lesson from Jeremiah's commission to, "pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). Paul commanded the young evangelist, "preach the

word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Now if someone says, just “preach the word” and leave error alone, we would have to ask this question: “Which part of God’s Word would you have me leave out of my preaching?” You see if I leave off preaching against error, I must leave out Colossians 2 for the second chapter of this epistle is directed at errors confronting the church (Gnosticism, etc.). Almost all of the Galatian letter—6 chapters worth—refutes errors facing the church. Leave out refutation of error and you will have to edit the epistle of 1 Corinthians because Paul dealt with sin and error frequently there. And while we are deciding which passages to cut out of our preaching, we must remove several scores of verses from Hebrews and James. And by the way, we can no longer preach from either 2 Peter or Jude—they are almost completely devoted to refuting error. And the epistles of John (1st, 2nd, and 3rd John) simply must go because they are militant against error. The book of Revelation gets kicked out of our preaching because John called the specific congregations by location (rebuking five of the seven churches), and then called the name of a specific group of false teachers (qtd. in Oxendine 2).

These brethren actually think that they can conduct themselves in this skewed way and that no hurt can come to them or the church. With that in mind, please consider the following sage advice concerning such corrupt and absurd thinking. Fifty-eight years ago the following information made its appearance, but it is as relevant and fresh today (if not more so) than when it first appeared.

In every great restoration movement, whether it is religious or otherwise, there is always the danger that some will deviate from those principles that gave it its birth. This was true in the movement to restore New Testament Christianity in our country. This great movement had not been long under way until some men lost sight of the fundamental principles of the restoration, and were injecting into their teaching the opinions and doctrines of men. In this manner mechanical instruments of music and missionary societies were brought into the church. To some, these things seemed harmless enough at first, but they were steps in the wrong direction, and those who followed them, were led back into the realms of denominationalism. As we strive to keep alive the restoration movement, the extent to which our digressive friends have gone should be a constant reminder that any deviation from New Testament teaching, however slight it may seem, is a dangerous thing.

You will recall that during the last war, Eddie Rickenbacker and his companions were forced to crash-land their plane in the sea, and drifted for many days upon the bosom of the deep. As Mr. Rickenbacker and his companions were taking off on their flight, a tire blew out, causing their plane to careen and crash into a plane standing close by.

They were forced to transfer to another plane to continue their flight. In the crash, the navigator's instruments had been thrown against the side of the plane. The navigator checked these instruments carefully, and believing them to be undamaged, carried them with him into the other plane. By these instruments they set their course, and all seemed well until they reached the point where they should be sighting their destination. When they were unable to do this, they sent out a radio message only to learn that they were hundreds of miles off their course. They had no choice but to land in the sea and trust that they would be rescued. These men were all experienced fliers and navigators, but they were completely lost. They had set their course by an instrument that was inaccurate. So small was this inaccuracy that it could not be detected by an experienced eye, but the farther they went into the distance, the farther they were from the course they thought they were following.

This story of Mr. Rickenbacker's experience is a good illustration of the dangers of digression that are ever present with us. The slightest deviation from God's simple truth, however unimportant it may seem at the time, will lead us farther from our course the farther we go into the future (Burns 168-169).

There can be no peace as it is defined in the Scriptures if those who are in the position of watchmen on the spiritual walls of Zion refuse to do their duty. Over 700 years before our Lord walked this earth, Isaiah had somewhat to say of watchmen who were derelict in their duty:

His watchmen *are* blind: they are all ignorant, they *are* all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, *they are* greedy dogs *which* can never have enough, and they *are* shepherds *that* cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, *say they*, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, *and* much more abundant (Isa. 56:10-12).

No congregation of God's people has the peace that God desires it to have when the elders and/or the preacher are *blind* to the enemies of Truth that constantly threaten the church from within and without (56:10). Imagine physically blind men being selected to be the watchman of a city. As absurd as such a thing would be, it is even more absurd and ridiculous when elders and preachers are willingly blind to false teachers and other problems that trouble the Lord's church. An important part of the job of elders and preachers is to warn brethren of false teachers and false doctrine, but if these men do not see the error (for whatever reason), the approaching enemy will not be seen, and only a spiritual disaster is the consequence of such blindness.

Ezekiel warned the watchmen of his day with the following words:

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 (Eze. 3:18).

It is no light matter to fail to see trouble coming because we do not want to deal with it, and, thus, we had rather make ourselves blind to it.

Years ago we witnessed certain brethren purposely turn a blind eye to the false teachers in the colleges operated by the brethren as they filtered out into the church to sow their discord. At about the same time we observed various brethren close their eyes to the errors that had taken over the Herald of Truth radio and television programs along with the Highland congregation in Abilene, Texas (its sponsoring congregation). Later we saw the same thing with brethren refusing to see the old “Crossroads” errors, the marriage divorce and remarriage error of the late James D. Bales and other false teaching concerning this subject. Then came Buster Dobbs with his false doctrine of “Except for sin, all of life is worship.” At about the same time, Mac Deaver began to advocate his error regarding the direct work of the Holy Spirit on the inward man of the Christian. In the previous errors as well as others, various brethren had no problem seeing and opposing them. However, of late we have watched brethren bend over backwards to the point of breaking their backs to keep from seeing the reaffirmation/re-evaluation of elders error taught and practiced by Dave Miller and the Brown Trail Church of Christ, Bedford, Texas. These same brethren deliberately blind themselves to Miller’s error on marriage intent and the erroneous conduct of the staff of Apologetic’s Press in preaching at churches engaged in error without making any attempt to correct these churches. They also turn a blind eye to Stan Crowley’s false doctrine on marriage divorce and remarriage, while all the time refusing to make any effort to correct Miller, Crowley, and their partners in error.

Many of these same brethren who have readily seen the previous errors of Bales, Dobbs, Deaver, et al., refuse to see the errors of Miller and Crowley. Some brethren have recognized these two men as false teachers and will not fellowship them directly, but they will fellowship those brethren who do directly fellowship Miller and Crowley. Other brethren think that Miller and Crowley are teaching error, but they do not consider their false teaching to be significant enough to cease their

fellowship with these two men or those who fellowship them. Neither will the brethren teach publicly against Miller and Cowley's errors. Where is their respect for God and His Word when these brethren fly into the face of those Scriptures that condemn fellowshiping false teachers (2 John 9-10)? Their willful blindness has blocked from their minds God's condemnation of being a respecter of persons in applying the Truth of God's Word without fear or favor to all alike.

Isaiah cited the *ignorance* of these so-called watchmen as part of the reason for their failure to be faithful watchmen (Isa. 56:10). The motto of some elders and preachers seems to be: "What one does not know will not hurt them." How many elderships really understand what their work is? Do they really understand what the church is? Do they know that part of their work is to enlighten the brethren they oversee so they will not fall into the snare of the devil? Do they respect Bible authority (Col. 3:17)? Do such men know how to ascertain Bible authority? Do they know that most of their work is in the area of choosing the option that best discharges the obligations God has laid on the church to discharge? Are they informed enough in the Words of Truth and in the various errors that trouble the church to know the difference in friend and foe? Do they know who the major false teachers are? How is one who does not recognize the enemy able to warn the church of the enemy's presence? Do elders know the devices of Satan, so they may refute them (2 Cor. 2:11)?

Paul informed the young preacher Titus that part of the work of elders is:

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: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, *even* a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians *are* alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth (Tit. 1:9-14).

Obviously part of the work of elders is to be "mouth stoppers." All too often elders end up stopping the mouths of faithful preachers and church members as they work to prop up and defend the devil's crowd. There are those who need to be rebuked sharply, but again, the false

teacher is often defended, and the one who opposes error is rebuked sharply. Thus, in their ignorance and pride elders have been known to protect the liar and condemn those who expose the evil workers. There can be no peace, as the Bible defines peace, in the church where such ignorance prevails. Faithful watchmen are able to declare of themselves as the Psalmist wrote: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11).

There can be no true peace where the watchmen are **cowards** (dumb dogs who will not bark) (Isa. 56:10). Nevertheless, the church has such men in the eldership and among those who claim to be Gospel preachers. They refuse to oppose the moneyed sinners in the church for fear of losing their contribution. Preachers refuse to preach on certain issues because certain prominent sinful church members will get their hackles up and begin their deceitful efforts to fire the faithful preacher. Also, as we have seen in recent years, a number of preachers have bowed themselves toward preacher training schools as certain one’s did forty years ago to the colleges (in certain places they continue to bow toward the colleges today). All of this these cowards have done and do for fear they will be *black-balled* by these institutions—losing and/or failing to find a preaching job because of the same. Whether elders, preachers, or any other church member, such men are hirelings. They do not seek Truth for Truth’s sake. They will strike hands with the wolf to save themselves rather than kill the ravenous beast.

We do not need **dreamers** as they are defined in Isaiah 56:10. We need men who follow the Divine pattern that is the New Testament. They need to anchor themselves in the will of the Lord and not let theirs or anyone else’s own personal likes and dislikes get in the way of carrying it out. Elders are under shepherds to Christ and are to take care of the church as the owner of it wills it to be taken care of. That being the case, they will oppose every thing and all persons who do not “become sound doctrine” in life and practice (Tit. 2:1).

Thus, unfaithful and unconcerned watchmen cannot help the church to have the peace that God wants the church to possess. Keep in mind the following: **The peace that we enjoy in Christ does not rule out all kinds of battles that we must fight to uphold the Lord’s Truth and oppose His enemies in the persecution of Christians or problems arising in the church.** The peace the faithful child of God has is in the knowledge that one is fully acceptable to God as he walks in the

light as Christ is in the light. As we are faithful to our Lord's cause the blood of Christ continually cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7). This is the blessed assurance that God has only promised to His faithful children and no one else (Eph. 1:3).

Jesus Christ is the Christian's peace because our Lord on Calvary's cross paid our debt to God with His sinless body that He offered on the cross in sacrifice for our sins and with His blood that He lovingly shed for the remission of our sins. Our peace is a reality because we steadfastly continue to live within the boundaries of the perfect law of liberty (Jam. 1:25; 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10). Therefore, only those who are faithful to Christ have this peace. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is truly our rock, our sword, and our shield—the only true and abiding source for the peace that transcends time and material things throughout the eternal ages to come following the complete and absolute dissolution of this present world (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

CONCLUSION

We, therefore, at all costs must remain faithful to our Lord. This is the only way for us to gain heaven. All of those who speak of love while disobeying God are liars, and the Truth is not in them (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-5; 5:2-3). Our love of God demands doing what God authorizes us to do in His Word—no more, or no less (Col. 3:17). Therefore, the way of peace is the way of obedience to Jesus Christ as His mind is revealed in His last Will and Testament, the last 27 books of the Bible (Ecc. 12:13; Heb. 5:9).

Let none of us be found guilty of saying we love the Lord with all of our being while at the same time embracing any false doctrine and/or fellowshiping false teachers. Only the disobedient and rebellious find a twisted solace in such hypocritical conduct. Always remember that those who do “the loving thing” are those who allow the Word of Christ to dwell in them richly (Col. 3:16). Daily they labor to bring their actions into subjection to the will of our Lord (1 Cor. 9:27). Yes, this is “the loving thing to do” in our relationship with any and all things and persons, and we dare not allow anyone to teach us otherwise. This is the way of peace—the way of the cross—the only way leading to our eternal home in heaven with God. We dare not miss it. **But before that eternal peace can be ours, there must come the sword** (2 Tim. 3:12).

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INABILITY TO BLUSH

JEREMIAH 6:15

Dennis “Skip” Francis

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THE CALLOUS EFFECT

When I was young, we got more enjoyment out of our three channels of black and white television (even with adjusting the “rabbit ears” to receive the picture clearly) than we do today with high definition plasma screens, satellite dishes, and 200 channels. One of the few types of programming that I enjoy today is detective shows—especially those that have a scientific component. I am particularly fascinated at how they conclude “who done it” and “how” with such scanty clues as a drop of blood, a single hair, or a scrap of fiber. The days of Sherlock Holmes making a fast exit of 221B Baker Street with only the assistance of Dr. Watson and his trusty magnifying glass have developed into the era of DNA and spectral analysis.

In watching these television programs, there is one area in which my wife and I differ. When graphic dismembered human remains are depicted, even though they may just be a Hollywood special effect, my wife will often turn her head, close her eyes, and say, “Tell me when it’s over!” (This is especially true if it involves bugs!) I, on the other hand, will watch with rapt attention to not miss a single clue, which I hope will give me the answer before it is revealed on the program. The question is: Why I am less affected by such depictions than my wife? The answer lies in our backgrounds.

Some thirty years ago I was a volunteer fireman and, as such, was encouraged to take the required courses to pass the Emergency Medical Technician’s exam in California. At that time I was very concerned over my reaction to seeing what was inevitable: human beings in various stages of dismemberment and death. To be able to tolerate such and not shy away from it, I began a personal program to build up my tolerance. The Fire Department kept a number of publications on hand that were only available to emergency services personnel, one of which was put out by the California Highway Patrol. It contained graphic pictures of accident scenes, which I would pore over to steel myself against my first encounters with such tragedy up close and personal. During my EMT classes, I would also watch graphic videos of various medical procedures and slide shows of autopsies as additional preparation. As it turned out, this prepared me well for what was to come. I had built up a mental *callous* against the difficulties of the job. Such *callousing* comes as a result of frequent contact with the very thing that might otherwise affect us in a different way.

What has this to do with blushing? It certainly has a great deal to do with those who have lost the ability to blush. They have become calloused with too much contact with abomination.

INABILITY TO BLUSH

Jeremiah 6:15 states:

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.

Here the Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah, reproves Judah and Jerusalem for their inability to blush at abomination. Why is it that they had lost this ability?

One of the *common knowledge* areas with regard to the blush response is that animals do not have the ability at all. This is largely because animals do not have the depth of emotion common in human beings. Blushing occurs when you are embarrassed, angry, excited, or experiencing some other strong emotion (“Skin”). When one loses the ability to blush, these emotions no longer have an effect on you (as with the animal kingdom).

In the passage in question, God has indicated that Judah has lost this ability due to having no shame in the practice of abomination. What is an *abomination* in the eyes of the Lord?

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, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren (Pro. 6.16-19).

God has given us seven things that are an abomination to Him. In reading and studying these things, it becomes apparent that they may apply either to our nation as a whole or to the church, which is the kingdom of God. The mention of Benjamin and Jerusalem is indicative that God is talking to Judah, and warning them of their impending captivity by the Chaldeans. The first five abominations are applicable to our nation today (and to some extent the last two). Even more importantly, however, is the way in which the last two affect the church of our Lord.

A PROUD LOOK

For one to *look* proud, it would seem evident that the feeling must go along with the look. A person with a “proud look” would therefore be proud of themselves. An apocryphal story about Abraham Lincoln tells the tale of when he was President of the United States and was advised to include a certain man in his cabinet. When he refused, he was asked why he would not accept him. “I don’t like his face,” the President replied. “But the poor man isn’t responsible for his face,” responded his advocate. “Every man over forty is responsible for his face,” countered Lincoln. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee” (Pro. 23:7).

Our nation has a new attitude about the sin of pride. Our modern psychologists have told us to have the attitude of “I’m Ok, you’re Ok,” yet this is not a Bible concept. In fact, the Bible says something more like, “None of us is ok!” “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

There is probably no greater example of the sin of pride than in man’s inherent desire to reject God. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: God *is* not in all his thoughts” (Psa. 10:4). When man becomes too prideful, he believes he has no need of God. As we look at our nation, we see more and more examples

of such desire among men. Instead of seeking God, men have begun to worship the earth. Global warming, so-called “greening,” and “Earth Day” have taken the place of worshipping God on the “Lord’s day.” Though we should all do our part for clean water and air, it should not supplant God as our religion.

I remember when John Lennon, during the height of the fame of the Beatles, told the international press that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Though he was castigated by the religious community for saying it, there was an element of truth in his statement. Various worldly pursuits have become more *popular* in the eyes of some than seeking God and His kingdom. Most of this is a result of pride.

The only time in recent history when the people of the United States turned to God en masse was after the tragedy known as “911.” It was then that people prayed to the heavenly Father for the nation. It was only after the nation’s pride was brought down that most, albeit temporarily, realized that God was not someone we could afford to do without. “Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18).

Is it a statement of pride to say we are “one nation under God”? It probably is not if we mean it and demonstrate it by our actions! But is it really true? Our nation could learn a wonderful lesson from Shiloh!

But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto *this* house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh (Jer. 7:12-14).

What had been the sin of Shiloh? “Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, *are* these” (7:4). Shiloh had shown the same level of pride in having the tabernacle within their city gates, yet had lied about following God. They were defeated by the Philistines, the ark was captured, and the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, were killed. Our nation could learn well from such a lesson when we proudly boast of being a “Christian nation”! Instead, pride is no longer *blushed* at.

A LYING TONGUE

Since it is our nation we are speaking of, what lies has our own government foisted upon our people that they continue to propagate? Well, one might assume there are many! One of the most insidious is the one known as “separation of church and state” (“Separation”). We have had this particular *doctrine* shoved down our collective throats since 1962, when in fact it was neither believed nor practiced in times past.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads in part: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The reality of the design of this phrase is to maximize personal religious freedom and minimize government intervention into that arena. In fact, the United States Supreme Court’s decisions on this subject have re-interpreted the amendment to mean that no religious expression is allowed in any government-run organization. This would include state run school systems, where such interpretation has become a testing ground.

The original test case, *Engel v. Vitale*, effectively eliminated public prayer in the schools. Though this case centered on the idea of a “required” prayer, and in this case an “official” public prayer, this decision has been much broader based in application. The later case of *Murray v. Curlett* (“Abington”) became even better known due to the involvement of Madalyn Murray O’Hair—later head and founder of American Atheists. This Supreme Court decision effectively banned the reading of the Bible in the public school arena.

The entire doctrine of “separation of church and state” is based on a fictitious concept and poor interpretation of a statement made by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in January of 1802. The Danbury Baptist Association was concerned about the very kind of thing that we see before us today: government intervention into religious affairs. Their concern was more in the realm of a state-sponsored religion—the like of which had been the case in England. In answer to that question Thomas Jefferson responded in part:

I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State (“Baptists”).

We need to remember that “context counts” when determining meaning. Jefferson’s statement was not meant in the larger context that

it is interpreted into today. In fact, most public education institutions at the time of Jefferson and the other founding fathers not only had a Bible curriculum, most were founded as institutions for the instruction of the sacred Volume! Today most lies are simply excused; thus, even when caught, folks do not blush.

HANDS THAT SHED INNOCENT BLOOD

Could there be a more divisive issue in American politics than that of abortion? Those that involve themselves in the matter at all will only do so by using terms that do not even get to the heart of the matter. They say they are either “pro choice” or “pro life.” This kind of *smoke and mirrors* is not unusual in the political realm. They simply do not like to use *abortion* as it sounds so harsh and is so tainted. I remember the first time I heard the term used in a movie and how shocked I was in hearing it. In the film, the town’s people were just about ready to lynch all those involved in it—from the mother to the doctor. Two wrongs do not make a right, and I am not in favor of violence against anyone, but this film rightly depicted most folks’ reaction to the practice of abortion at the time.

Today, our emotional *callous* prevents us from blushing at the term at all. In fact, many terms that once were relegated only to adult discussion, and most often not in *mixed company*, are now commonly used in virtually **all** venues. The fact that things like homosexuality and abortion are now common political platform planks tells a great deal about the direction our country has taken in recent years.

Abortion was *legalized* in the United States in the momentous *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 (“Roe”). Most people in America are not even familiar with the legal precedents used or the rationale behind this decision. Largely, the decision was based on the “right to privacy,” which is, of itself, a legal fiction. There simply is no such guarantee in the United States Constitution. In fact, the Justices had to stretch a point from the Fourteenth Amendment, which has to do with the rights of “Due Process,” to apply the decision made. The rationale used was that abortion should be legal to protect “the health of the mother” and would not be used after the first trimester (at least that is what was being said in 1973). The fact is that, since the *Roe v. Wade* decision was made, nearly fifty million babies have had their lives terminated by abortion, and over 98% of them have been as a kind of retroactive “birth control.” Many doctors have categorically denied that there is

ever a real *medical* reason to terminate a pregnancy, especially in the later months, except in very rare instances. Further, we all know about the practice of “late term abortion.” This practice kills a viable infant right up to the ninth month.

Another terminology issue that comes to mind is the practice of referring to the babe in the womb as a “fetus.” This is another *get around* used by those who do not wish to be categorized with Pharoah or Herod, who killed *actual* babies. The fact is that fetus is **not** the term that God uses: “For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 1:44). If “hands that shed innocent blood” are an abomination to the Lord, how must He feel about those that shed the blood of the **most** innocent among us?

A HEART THAT DEVICES WICKED IMAGINATIONS

We are a nation blessed with every good physical thing imaginable. Most of us today would not know what to do without many of the devices that are a regular part of our lives. Computers and cellular phones are now commonplace. The cell phone revolution has been incredible and it seems as though there is not much that one cannot do with the right phone.

Though the majority of technical devices were designed with good purposes in mind, many of them are now being used for evil. The “wicked imagination” can make evil out of good every time. The home computer is one of the greatest boons to mankind in modern times. For research, communications, and entertainment, it is unrivaled. The vast majority of Gospel preachers, and probably most that are at this lecturership, would not know what to do without such devices. I personally do a lot of work with PowerPoint, participate on various email lists, and do lots of research on the internet, yet the internet has a tremendous downside—the most prevalent of which is pornography.

Pornography has become the signature problem of our day. Our government is attempting to take some steps to halt this epidemic, but our own court system continues to step in with cries of “freedom of speech.” What makes this such a poor argument is the fact that there is already legal precedence for inhibiting such practice if it is proven to be harmful to the moral fabric of society. Freedom of speech does not allow one to cry “fire” in a crowded theater, yet our legal system is allowing pornography to go virtually unchecked based on “freedom of speech.”

Many will say, “But I don’t look at pornography.” **Really!?** I know of many brethren who watch television programs like *Jerry Springer* or *Montel*, or think nothing about watching *Desperate Housewives* or *Dancing with the Stars* no matter **how** scantily clad the women on such programs are. I know of many who watch soap operas or go to “R” rated movies, where there is little left to the imagination. When I was young, a bare female torso was considered “pornography,” yet today full frontal nudity is not. Where does it end?

Our society today is over-sexed! Being *sexy* or *hot*, or even *smoking hot* has become the desire of many in our country today. When a forty-year-old mother talks about her “smoking hot body” on national television, one wonders how her twenty-year-old sons feel? Almost every television program now advertises products such as Cialis, Viagra, or other similar products designed to enhance the sex life. I am not opposed to a healthy sex life in the undefiled marriage bed, but it does not need to be advertised on television, and it certainly does not have to motivate so much of our lives! Christians should be motivated by their spiritual lives, not their sex lives! “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (Job 31:1).

SWIFT FEET IN RUNNING TO MISCHIEF

One of the things that we learn about righteous Lot is that, even though he is considered to be godly, he still “pitched *his* tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:12). It seems as though *greener pastures* were more important to Lot at the time than residing with the saints of his day. Such can rightly be said about our government and many other aspects of our society.

Many of our politicians are “pitching their tents toward Sodom” to gain the vote of the homosexual community. They, like Lot, are merely looking at the *greener pastures* of the cities of the plain and ignoring the long term problems that will ensue. We have been told for years that the so-called “gay community” has no political agenda (*gay* has been usurped by them to soften the meaning of what they do—they are still homosexuals, yes, still sodomites). This has been a lie. Gay marriage (an oxymoron) has already begun in at least three states. The wording of the constitution requires other states to recognize the laws of these states, so what is the outcome? It is obvious.

The homosexual claim is that of “prejudice,” yet this is not at all true. Webster defines marriage as a “union involving a husband and a

wife.” The homosexual is not barred from having a union involving a husband and a wife, as such terms are also defined in the dictionary.

One reason why the men from Washington D.C. have become so enamored with the homosexual community is the same reason why many Americans now readily accept homosexuality as “normal”—**Hollywood!** Almost every movie being made, and nearly every television show, has homosexual normalcy being portrayed on a regular basis. This is no surprise when one looks at the history of the Hollywood crowd and realizes that homosexuals have been readily accepted among the actors for nearly a century. Those that were practicing sodomites were simply not *outed* to the public. Even elaborate mock *marriages* were established to shield the actor from public scrutiny. Such is no longer the case. It has now become fashionable to tout one’s homosexual tendencies in public.

For me, it has always seemed odd when politicians try to get around the problems inherent in such behavior and attempt to support these aberrant *lifestyles*, even in a veiled way. Many of the current crop have refused to sign a constitutional amendment that properly defines marriage (just as some will not agree to such a federal ban on abortion). One wonders just what makes a problem **big** enough to be a federal problem instead of a state problem? In the 1920s and 1930s, murderers and bank robbers could drive across a state line and avoid prosecution. If abominations against God are not a **big** enough problem, I do not know what is! “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34).

Homosexuals are not *gay* (which means “happy”). They are not involved in an *alternative lifestyle*. They are not *life partners*. They are not *significant others*. The Bible says they are **sinner**s! Homosexuality is now and has always been an abomination against God. “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” (Rom. 1:27).

Many try to imply that they cannot “help it” because they are “born that way” and simply cannot change. Hogwash! In fact, both biblically and scientifically, they are **not** “born that way.” Many so-called “scientific studies” have attempted to prove the un-provable, that homosexuality is inherited, yet the studies have failed to show such results.

In fact, with identical twins, who carry the exact same DNA, there are those that are homosexual and those who are not. All other similar studies have come up with the same result: they are **not** “born that way,” because homosexuality is **not** inherited! What we **do** know about genetics is that the human genome **only** controls physical traits, and **not** behavior. No one is genetically disposed to homosexuality, drunkenness, or any other type of behavior-oriented characteristic. Thus, if they **can** “help it,” they **can** change!

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Instead of a full fledged embrace of this abomination, our nation’s leaders should go back to blushing over the mere mention of it!

A FALSE WITNESS

I have heard it said by several of the *older* brethren that “a liberal **will** lie.” This is largely due to the effect of Post-modern philosophy on the brethren. One of the basic tenets of this philosophy teaches that the “end justifies the means”; thus, it is okay to lie if you get the end result you want. I have come to the conclusion that *liberal* needs to be more broadly used than in times past.

In my own recent experience, I have seen quite a number of men in the body of Christ that I have had great respect for lie to justify some practice or another. This is often in the form of a mischaracterization of the position they themselves hold or the position of some person they fellowship and intend to keep on fellowshipping even though they may now be a false teacher. Let us look at one case in point that came out of the 2006 West Kentucky Lectures “Open Forum”:

1. Curtis Cates mischaracterized Dave Miller’s elder reevaluation/reaffirmation doctrine as not being “as it is practiced among the liberals.” This statement is false and misleading. He went on to say that Dave “denies” what they are accused of having practiced, yet the documents prove otherwise.

2. At the same lectureship, Keith Mosher mischaracterized those that oppose Dave Miller and fellowship with him as “vile” and “liars” when, in fact, the written, and printed, and distributed evidence

says something entirely different. A person is only a “liar” if what he is saying is indeed “a lie.” He further stated that these men wanted to “destroy about 9 good works in the brotherhood.” Again, a work is only *good* if it is approved of God and maintains God’s standards for that work. Not having fellowship with error is one of those standards.

3. Then, Charles Leonard spoke of brethren who “will not meet.” Though he later stipulated that he was talking about another situation that he was involved in, it was perceived by most that he was addressing the Dave Miller circumstance. Inadvertently, he was really addressing those on the very platform from which he spoke. Such is true because we have made several attempts to “meet.” All the *key players* involved with Memphis School Of Preaching, Apologetics Press, Gospel Broadcasting Network, and others were invited to the 2006 Contending for the Faith Lectures Open Forum, but none came. They were invited in 2007 to the Mountain City, Tennessee church Unity Forum, but none came. They were even invited by brother Lynn Parker to meet in the Forest Hill (overseers of Memphis School Of Preaching) church building (or anywhere else they chose!) in **any** format of their own design, as long as it was taped for all the brethren to have access to. This request was made on April 3, 2007. They never responded to this offer. Who is it that is not meeting?

4. Immediately thereafter, B. J. Clarke made the accusation that we have not investigated the evidence in this matter to insure the certainty of it. Again, I find this to be incredulous. A CD has been produced by brother Michael Hatcher and is now being distributed by brother David P. Brown, documenting fully the accusations that have been made against Dave Miller. This CD contains 142 separate pages, as well as audio files. How much evidence does one have to see to determine if the “thing is certain”? Curtis Cates and Keith Mosher’s response was, in essence, to “call Dave.” If the evidence is there in writing, and Dave Miller has habitually put forward a *revisionist* version, Dave would seem to be a poor witness to rely on. Further, two brethren **have** “called Dave” and have reported that brother Miller still believes in elder reevaluation/reaffirmation and “would do it again.”

This is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg as similar misstatements have been made by Dave Miller himself over his own positions, Malcolm Hill over his fellowship with Mac Deaver, Alan Highers over his participation in the David Lipscomb Lectures, Glenn Colley over

his participation and fellowship at the Lake Tahoe Encampment, and numerous others that have previously been upheld as *pillars*.

A lie is never right. It is gravely difficult when national leaders do it, like a former president did openly, but it is even more troubling when those who “seemed to be pillars” lie. It matters not if lying is not their intent—a lie is still a lie. If they did not lie intentionally, they still need to point out their error and repent of it. We need to keep in mind that lying was the beginning of evil in the world. This is the reason why Satan himself is called “the father of lies.” Just as with the other abominations, it becomes easier to tell a subsequent lie once the first one has passed the lips. One can readily become unable to blush over the lie.

SOWING DISCORD

Many things have been elements of “discord” between brethren over the years, but the most prevalent one today deals with matters of fellowship. Though there are other problems of a similar nature, one man seems to be at the heart of the current discord that exists between brethren, and a simple statement of repentance could go a long way to resolving the entire mess. That man is Dave Miller, current Director of Apologetics Press and author of the book *Piloting the Strait*.

Brother Miller both taught and practiced the false doctrine of elder reevaluation and reaffirmation at the Brown Trail Church of Christ in 1990 (and it was **false** as he taught it!) and supported it when it was practiced again in 2002. In telephone conversations with brethren over the past two years, he has stated his belief that he did nothing wrong and would do it again if the same situation existed. In addition to the elder reevaluation/reaffirmation doctrine, he also taught the “marriage intent” doctrine, in support of the notion that a “green card” marriage was not *really* a marriage and could be later dissolved without consequence. These are well-documented facts.

Dave Miller has not only **not** repented of these doctrines; he has added fuel to the fire by a statement he put out in 2005 that sought to revise history in regard to his involvement with these practices. Most of his statement has been proven to be inconsistent with documented facts.

Over 60 well-known brethren signed a statement of support for Apologetics Press under brother Miller, and not one of these signers, to date, has rescinded their support. In addition, Apologetics Press, under Dave Miller, is currently being supported by Memphis School of

Preaching, House to House/Heart to Heart, Polishing the Pulpit, the Gospel Broadcast Network, and numerous lectureships and meetings at which brother Miller and co-workers from Apolgetics Press are regular speakers.

Those of us who have stood opposed to fellowship with Miller and supporters of Apolgetics Press have lost pulpits, editorships, monetary support, friendships, and the fellowship of many whom we love. We have been called *toxic, vile, vicious, overbearing, obnoxious, liars, new antis*, along with a host of other terms. We have been accused of attempting to destroy several “good works” in the brotherhood. We have become the objects of derision by many whom we once counted as friends and brethren.

I do not mention even one of these issues to garner sympathy from anyone. In fact, I stand where the Lord stood, the prophets stood, the apostles stood, and many a Christian martyr stood; thus, I am in good company. Many of those who are now causing discord once stood where we do on most issues. I mention it, instead, to show what the sowing of discord can cause.

Some of the finest minds—preachers and teachers all—have been railroaded out of the pulpits they filled for years (mostly in just the past two years) over various problems of discord among brethren. I have been told by several that Dub McClish and Dave Watson are themselves at the heart of sowing the discord that currently exists yet have found this to be a baseless charge. In fact, they are two of the first that experienced the wrath of the powers that be. Both have been forced from editorships and pulpits due to their stand against fellowship of a false teacher. The same can be said for men like Danny Douglas, Lester Kamp, and a host of others. Current efforts are now in place to remove Darrell Broking from his pulpit and eldership by factions that are not even members of his congregation.

It has become apparent that many brethren today, even those that once properly opposed error, have become so enamored by their particular pet *good works* that they have lost sight of the scriptural admonition against fellowship with a false teacher. Further, they seem to view support of these “para-church” agencies as more important than unity in the Lord’s church. They seem willing to sow discord to support agencies like Apologetics Press, Memphis School of Preaching, the Gospel Broadcast Network, House to House/Heart to Heart, Pol-

ishing the Pulpit, and many other such groups. In view of what was evident at the 2006 West Kentucky Lectures in the attitudes portrayed, it seems that many of our brethren are un-blushing in their support of error, sowing of discord, false witness and you could probably throw pride and mischief onto the list.

Let us remember that God calls all this *abomination*, **not** mere “difference of opinion.”

CONCLUSION

Our nation has truly lost the ability to blush over any and all of the seven things that God calls abomination as a direct result of excess contact with abominable behavior and ideas, thus creating the mental and emotional *callous*. Further, as we have often seen evidence of, the Lord’s church has been affected by the worldly ideas of those outside the body of Christ. Many will buy in to the ideas of subjective, situational morality as taught by those of the Post-modern mind-set. I truly hope and pray for our nation **and** the church that the ability to blush returns and that we have not become so calloused in our contact with abomination that our consciences have become seered. Let us be “one nation under God” and **mean it!**

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ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS

JEREMIAH 6:16

David Hartbarger

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INTRODUCTION

When brother Hatcher gave me the assigned subject, my first response was: “This would be an easy subject that would be popular and well received.” After a moment’s reflection, I realized that, although I wished it were so, sadly, it is not the sentiment of many today. If ever there was a time to call the people of God back to the old paths, this is that time. Just as it was in the days of Jeremiah, so it is today in the Lord’s church. Too many have lost their way; they have jumped over to the broad way and love to have it so. Instead of being content to stay on the highway of righteousness, the narrow way, many of our brethren have allowed the call of the world to entice them to go the way of Baalim (Jer. 2:23). They would never admit it, but they are quick to vilify anyone who would dare challenge them! Just as Jeremiah needed the help of God, we too, need His help to make us “a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls” (1:18) to confront them.

Brethren, when you take the old paths, that excludes “my way.” When you choose the “old paths,” it requires a “thus saith the Lord” not a “my will be done” attitude. The “old paths” exclude popularity contests, reaffirmation polls, majority practices, intent (marriage), or pressures to bend God’s Word for the present generation. How many more congregations are going to be lost because of weak elders, unsound preachers and a general membership that does not know or care to know about the true church of the Bible?

Jeremiah’s task was not an easy one. The people no longer cared to hear God’s Word. They were determined to continue down the path that leads to destruction. They were fully enveloped in the lifestyle the

Bible describes as “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25). We face a similar challenge to that of Jeremiah; our message is not wanted, and we stand alone against the majority. Just like the weeping prophet, we are misunderstood and our motive and message is disparaged. We may have moments of weakness and feel like giving up, but we must continue on and “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12).

STAND IN THE WAY AND SEE

Jeremiah calls on the people to look and observe something. The old saying, “You can’t see the forest for the trees,” is a true axiom. What did Jeremiah want them to see? Possibly, he wanted them to see the effects of their apostasy in the city, on the streets, on the high places of idolatry, or maybe the multiplicity of idols so common in the heart of Jerusalem. He could have been referring to the open sin and crimes on the streets, the lack of respect for law and order, the extremities of concentrated wealth and widespread poverty. He may have had in mind the effects of the physical drought on the land or more importantly the spiritual drought that permeated every corner of the nation. One thing is obvious: If they could see things for what they truly were, they were not moved to reform. The good king Josiah, contemporary with Jeremiah, brought about a reformation that stayed the hand of God but apparently did not win back the hearts of the people to God. They claimed faith and fidelity to God, but their actions proved them to be hypocrites. God compares them to wild lustful animals (Jer. 2:23-24).

Life is full of choices; some are small and insignificant; others are life altering. Lord, help us to know the difference and to realize there are consequences. Israel could not make the right choice. Judah was headed down the same path as her sister Israel and refused to learn her lesson. The time of judgment was at hand and she had precious little time to avert disaster. She refused to see the obvious: Life without God’s blessing was difficult. God was trying to bring them back by punishing them with natural calamities. Droughts, pestilence, crop failures, storms, fires, and threats from enemies would not turn them. What would it take to bring them to their senses? To get a better sense of the climate at that time, Dean Payne Smith wrote:

POLITICAL STATE OF AFFAIRS.—His call to the prophetic office came in the thirteenth year of Josiah. Danger was once again gathering round Judah, and to Jeremiah was assigned a more directly political position than to any other prophet. The destruction of Sennacherib’s

army in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (B.C. 693), though it had not freed the land from predatory incursions, had nevertheless put an end to all serious designs on the part of the Assyrians to reduce it to the same condition as that to which Shalmaneser had reduced Samaria. The danger of Judea really rose from Egypt on the one hand and Babylon on the other. In Egypt, Psammetichus put an end to the subdivision of the country, and made him self sole master in B.C. 649. As he reigned for fifty-four years he was—during the last eighteen or nineteen years of his life—contemporary with Josiah, but it was his successor Necho who slew Josiah at Megiddo. Meanwhile, as Egypt grew in strength, so Nineveh declined, partly from the effects of the Scythian invasion, but still more from the growing power of the Medes, and from Babylon having achieved its independence. Two years after the battle of Megiddo, Nineveh fell before a combined attack of the Medes under Cyaxares and the Babylonians under Nabopolassar. But Nabopolassar does not seem to have been otherwise a warlike king, and Egypt remained the dominant power till the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In that year (B.C. 586) Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish. Having peaceably succeeded his father, he returned to Judea, and Jehoiakim became his vassal. After three years of servitude Jehoiakim rebelled (2 Kings 24:1), and died. Three months after his son Jehoiachin, the queen-mother, and a large number of nobles and artificers were carried captive to Babylon. The growth of Egypt into a first-rate power under Psammetichus (2:18,36) raised the question of a close alliance with him. The youthful Jeremiah gave his voice against it. Josiah recognised that voice as inspired, and obeyed. His obedience cost him his life at Megiddo; but four years later Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish. On that day the fate of the Jewish nation was decided, and the primary object of Jeremiah's mission then ceased. The ministry of Jeremiah really belonged to the last eighteen years of Josiah's reign. Judah's probation was then going on, her salvation still possible; though each year Judah's guilt became heavier, her condemnation more certain. But to the eye of man her punishment seemed more remote than ever. Jehoiakim was the willing vassal of Egypt, the supreme power. No wonder that, being an irreligious man, he scorned all Jeremiah's predictions of utter and early ruin; no wonder that he destroyed Jeremiah's roll, as the record of the outpourings of mere fanaticism. It was his last chance, his last offer of mercy; and as he threw the torn fragments of the roll on the fire he threw there in symbol his royal house, his doomed city, the temple, and all the people of the land. It was in this fourth year of Jehoiakim that Jeremiah boldly foretold the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar's empire, and the wide limits over which it would extend. This prophecy (chap. 25) placed his life in danger, so that "the Lord hid" him and Baruch (Jer 36:26). When Jeremiah appears again, Nebuchadnezzar was advancing upon Jerusalem to execute the prophecy contained in Jer 36:30, 31. And with the death of Jehoiakim the first period of Judah's history was brought to

a close. Though Jeremiah remained with Zedekiah, and tried to influence him for good, yet his mission was over. He testifies himself that the Jewish Church had gone with Jehoiachin to Babylon. Zedekiah and those who remained in Jerusalem were but the refuse of a fruit basket from which everything good had been culled (chap. 24), and their destruction was a matter of course. Jeremiah held no distinctive office towards them” (v - vi).

There are limits to God’s longsuffering and the day of reckoning was at hand. Judah was totally consumed by her own lusts and nothing would change her mind. She was in no mood to hear, much less, to heed Jeremiah’s message. Why do men still reject the “old paths”? Why, in spite of all the hurt and harm and when sin offers no hope and no future? We truly are our own worst enemies. How many times have you observed someone who continually makes the wrong choices and suffers over and over? Some people just cannot be helped. We need to remind them that if they keep doing what they are doing, they are going to keep on getting what they are getting. If they want to have better results, they need to change their actions.

Just what were the benefits for these rebellious people? What gains did they enjoy in their *freedom* from God? Did they enjoy a closer relationship with their idols? Did their prayers and sacrifices to these man-made gods bless them with wealth, good health, and acceptance by their neighbors? Their sin, in their infidelity to God, was unique.

For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD (Jer. 2:10-12).

This so-called freedom from God was just their freedom from conscience to sin and have the approval of their peers. This freedom was in reality servitude to Satan. What happened to self-control, honesty, and uprightness? What about God’s blessings of rain in its season, bountiful harvests, national security, domestic tranquility, stable homes, loving families, justice, law and order, economic stability, and general prosperity? Were these things of little or no concern to these Israelites? Certainly a rational person would weigh the facts before making a choice, or would he? When you choose the seed you will sow, you have sealed the harvest. You cannot sow to the flesh and reap eternal life. The children of Israel were about to learn this lesson the hard way.

Jeremiah's plea was really a wake-up call to Judah. The proper reply should have been obvious. The callous answer was no doubt expected. Why should God have to plead with His people to straighten up? Why should He extend time and patience to a people who were intent on backsliding? Why do we try to engage wayward brethren and seek to reason with them to return to the "old paths"? Why should we continue to be insulted, ignored, ridiculed, maligned, persecuted, misrepresented, and misjudged? The answer is love—real, genuine love, not some weak-kneed, mollifying sentiment but a love that cares enough to confront and warn of wrongdoing. It is a love that points to the "old paths."

To expound upon the dire situation, Jeremiah is instructed to search Jerusalem for one just man who is seeking the truth, and He would pardon it (5:1). We are reminded of Abraham's boldness concerning a pardon for Sodom. God would have spared it for ten righteous souls. Now, not even one upright man could be found, none to stand in the gap. Ezekiel, also contemporary with Jeremiah, writes: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Eze. 22:30). We are indeed fortunate that this is not the case today. There are many faithful brethren who would never sell their birthright for a mess of pottage or any other *mess* making the rounds. To them, loyalty to God means more than loyalty to man. May we all emulate Jeremiah's faithfulness to God and His message.

BUT GOD REMEMBERS

With all of the evil in His people, God remembers another time, another generation.

Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land *that was* not sown. Israel *was* holiness unto the LORD, *and* the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD (Jer. 2:2-3).

The children of Israel should have been thankful for all that God had done for them. Hell will include the unthankful (Rom. 1:18-21). Instead of being a beacon of hope to the world, they had become a source of shame. So much potential was squandered away; what once could have been was now lost. God's Words here are enough to make

one cry as we feel for His great loss. For all of the evil committed by His traitorous people, God (with great affection) remembers the good days. For us today, in spite of our sins, God remembers His Son on the cross and graciously forgives when we repent. When we follow the “old paths” we, too, can be “holiness unto the Lord.” With all of the divisiveness in the church today, we, like Jeremiah, must plead for the church to stand in the way (honestly evaluate the current situation) and repent, wherever and whenever appropriate, that we might be healed. Only then can we make a united effort against the devil. Israel could have been redeemed, and so can we unless we wait too long (2 Pet. 3:9).

LIFE IS A JOURNEY

When it comes down to it, there are only two paths to choose from. The most popular way is the broad way that leads to destruction (Mat. 7:13-14). This includes every device of Satan, and every invention of man. It may be an “ism” or any multiplicity of philosophies, but it all boils down to Satan’s lies. The other path, the “old path” is the true path—God’s path. That path leads to life eternal and it goes straight through Jesus. Jesus said unto Thomas: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); “By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Heb. 10:20).

It is the **old** way, the eternal way. Why is it that some new way seems to attract so much attention? It is not “politically correct” to affirm that there is only one way to heaven or even insist that it is through Christ. No matter what the world says, no matter how mightily we may be opposed, we must be bold with the “words of life” (cf. Rom. 1:16; Acts 4:12; John 12:48, et al.).

It is the **good** way. It is the only good way! It is that pearl of great price, and to attain it we must sell all and begin a new life in Christ. The Bible is still referred to as the “good book” by some. The reason is that God is the author and He wants only good for us. The good way is the safe way—not that God hedges us in or places us in a cocoon insulated from the trials and circumstances of life, but it is a way that helps us to overcome and it leads to a better destination. The good way is the way of faith and action (Jam. 2:14-26). A token observance will not do. A half-hearted commitment will not sustain one when adversity comes. Many say they are on board but are just along for the ride. When the

ride gets a little bumpy, they fall away. Instead of encouraging others, they are a stumbling block.

A parallel to the attitude of the people in Jeremiah's day is perfectly illustrated in the *Contending For The Faith*, February 2008 issue. The editor, David P. Brown, writes:

[For Timothy's spiritual protection Paul listed certain identifying marks of false teachers. Of them he told Timothy: 'from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth' (2 Tim. 3:2-7).—Editor] (14).

This issue (along with all the others) is a must read for everyone who ever doubted the unloving attitude of the liberal so-called Christian. May God continue to bless brother Brown and those who write for him for their unrelenting stand for the truth and exposure of the hypocrites.

When apostate members attack the church of Christ and those who defend the faith, they are not just attacking man (the mere messenger) but God the author and Jesus Christ, the head of His church which He purchased with His blood. They are trying to make the profane (themselves) sacred and the sacred (the church) profane. They call the faithful “unloving” but their own words condemn and expose them as devouring beasts. No wonder they threw Jeremiah in a “miry dungeon” (Jer. 38:6)—and for what crime? Proclaiming God's Word! David Brown has had a lot of mud slung at him, too, but they are the ones that are losing *ground*. They are the ones that are up to their necks in the mud of sin. It never fails, when one does not have the truth on his side, he will stoop to insults and attacks against the person. By reading the ranting and harsh judging on the part Heather Sanders in the aforementioned issue, as reproduced in brother Brown's article “S. W. Church & Heather Sanders Revisted [sic],” one will see the depth of the liberal's *love*. One cannot also help but notice her affirmation of *faith* and in the same breath her pride about attending a denomination.

Tis a fair court/stop whining already

I attended an impromptu meeting with the SW [Southwest Church of Christ in Austin, TX] elders last night. It was a sneak attack but I believe I managed to maintain some of my integrity all the same.

If I were an elder, here's how I would have conducts said meeting, knowing what the agenda was:

Start the meeting with a prayer... possibly holding hands, I dunno... maybe that's too touchy feely. I then would have explained to the "wayward Christian" aka ME, that I was concerned about her soul, and those of her immediate family. I would have been loving in my approach, and told her that I cared very much about her, and didn't want to see her make a mistake. I would have also very gently explained to her that I was concerned about her influence on other weaker Christians. I would have asked her to consider that in her public image, i.e. myspace, facebook, etc... and asked her to please be careful that in her own search and struggle that she not cause others to question their own faith. I would have explained to her that her recent public image was not conducive to what we here at SW teach, and asked her to repent and change her ways, or else we would sadly, and with much prayer and soul searching, have to publicly disfellowship her. [That is an interesting approach, one of which she obviously did not judge me worthy of receiving in view of her open letter to me.—Editor]

And had that been the tone of the meeting, here's how I would have responded: "yes, I understand that my influence on those around me could cause them to stumble, and that is the last thing I want to do, so in light of that, I will try to be more discreet in my journey unless asked directly. I'm sorry, but I disagree with where you draw the lines of fellowship on certain issues, and am not planning on changing my "ways" so if you need to mark me, then that is your choice and I respect that. Please be courteous enough to let me know when it is going to happen so that I can give my family fair warning"

NOW, having been raised in the church, knowing what CofC teaches regarding "marking those that walk disorderly" (according to US) this is the way I would have handled my own particular situation, and that of other recent dissenters... with love, concern, and prayer. And, knowing what S W teaches regarding certain matters of doctrine, I would understand, and even appreciate that they need to be consistent and mark me as well...believe it or not, I don't disagree with the decision in light of the doctrine taught, and don't blame or fault anyone for remaining true to what they believe. I actually respect consistency a great deal, and although disagree with the doctrine, do not dispute the need to hold fast that which is true. (even if what you believe is true is different from me... it's your truth, so do what you need to do).

HOWEVER, that is far from how it went down last night.

I recently withdrew my membership from SW not so that I would be exempt from the impending public humiliation, but because I choose not to be under the elders there any more. I know that they will still "mark" me even though I'm no longer a member. It wasn't a "trick" (using Brett and Marion's own words) or ploy to stay under the radar, it was because I could no longer subject myself to the leadership of men that have shown over and over again their true colors when it comes to motivation behind their actions.

These same two men have been the source of gossip that has gone to their wives, friends, children, and eventually back to me.—Do you think that is how God wants the overseers of his flock to behave? Why do you think that people like me have stopped seeking their counsel? On more than one occasion, I personally have confided in either a preacher, or one of our elders, only to find out that it was not kept in confidence, and not only that, but was discussed (apparently) in front of their children who made snide comments about me to people at camp, or to my OWN CHILDREN? Or, twisted in such a way as to be used as ammunition for the next “come to Jesus” meeting planned for me? Do I sound suspicious and a little paranoid? Ask around. If you haven’t already been subjected to this brand of care and concern, better behave exactly as they expect you to, or you too will be the next “hot topic.”

Last night, I was asked why I was still attending (Sunday nights and Wednesday nights) if I wasn’t a member there...actually one of Brett’s opening lines, followed by a sarcastic palms outstretched and heaved up look. I tried to explain that I was there to keep some level of continuity and sanity religiously for my children’s sake.—they also have good friends there that they don’t want to leave (I do as well) and I didn’t want to tear them away from all they’ve ever known so abruptly. I then asked, “why, am I not welcome here anymore?” the response from Marion was, “Not if you don’t straighten up and stop trying to influence our members” I was blown away. The fact of the matter is that still attending SW is a huge compromise for me that I made for Darryl and the kid’s sake.— I don’t want to be there, and wouldn’t if it weren’t for them. My intention all along has NEVER been to influence anyone, I’ve even been very delicate with my own husband as he’s a much newer Christian than I am. I’ve never intentionally tried to persuade anyone to my “side” and would never. The last thing I want to do is to cause someone to question their own faith. It has been hard enough for me to own up to my own doubts. It has been terribly painful and gut wrenching, and I would never wish that on anyone. We all have a journey to take and we all reach certain points independently. What I have found, however, is that when certain people ask me questions about where I am religiously, it is because they too are searching, and needing to talk to someone. Motivation becomes very clear through conversation, and if I realize that they are asking me questions because they are concerned about me, then I am generally pretty honest about what it is that I believe. (lying is still wrong, no?) When it appears that they are asking me for “answers,” I always direct them to do their own searching. —Because we all have to do it for ourselves. —And on that topic, I have not been influenced by any one person. This has been brewing in my soul for several years now, and finding that there were people out there that had the same questions did embolden me, but it’s because I found something in common... not gurus.

The overall tone of the meeting was in my opinion, demanding, lacking in concern, and downright threatening. Let me pause and say that Brett and Marion did most of the talking. I find it a shame that Bill and Charles let themselves be represented by such abusive tactics because I know deep down, that that is NOT their nature. I have always had a great deal of respect for those two men, and was saddened that they didn't speak up more.—Not to defend me, but to handle this in the proper loving, Christ-like way that they should have. Perhaps it's naivety on my part, but I always felt a certain father/daughter fondness for them, and it pained me deeply to sit there subjected to Marion's arrogant, chauvinist ego, while they just sat silently and let him speak for the entire congregation. (Not wanting HIM to speak for ME anymore was one of the major reasons I withdrew) "You'd better straighten up, and behave, or we'll mark you too sister... you'd better believe it" "yeah, you had better keep your mouth shut" "If I find out that you've been talking to our members about all this nonsense that you are teaching (laughable) all this eastern philosophy bunk, I'll have you publicly escorted out of the building." "You know exactly what you're doing... we're not dealing with a naive person here, we're dealing with someone who's here to influence people, and we won't stand for it." I don't care if you're here or not, but I'm not going to let you cause trouble" And the last straw that prompted me to push my chair away from the table was, "this is a waste of time." to which I responded, "I'm sorry to have wasted your time."

Let me ask you, the reader, a question now: If what you have at SW is the truth...the only truth...and you're so sure of it, then what is it that the elders are so terrified of? You don't think they're scared? Why else would they place so much emphasis on the influence of people like me if they weren't worried about it affecting their tender little flock? "Circle the wagons" (because there are wolves like me ready to eat your young if you don't WATCH OUT yeah... I'm so popular that everyone I talk to is going to drop their lifelong faith, and follow me... even I'M not that arrogant!!!) If you have the truth, shouldn't there be some certainty and security there, regarding what will ultimately win out? Why feel the need to manage one or a handful of people they (sic) way they do? Are we that intimidating? —I had no Idea I was so powerful! My goodness...what an ego boost! I think I'll throw myself a little party!

I'm here to be a little bit in your face now and tell you that it is about CONTROL. It is a case of power, and the fear of losing it. To what?? ME?? I don't want a following, and neither do any of my friends. We just want to live our lives, follow Christ, follow the Bible, and be happy. Or, follow whatever other truth we believe in. YES, I said other truth. Why is that such a threat? Is it because we are not hiding what it is that we all believe individually? Why should we????? DO YOU????? Would you not also recoil if told to keep your mouth shut?

I certainly did! And it's the "not keeping my mouth shut" that is going to get me fired. Sorry to disappoint, but your opinion of me has ZERO bearing on my salvation, and cutting off my shallow relationships is not going to be enough to keep me under your thumb. It may have worked before, but I'm done with that. I made mention of the fact that I had never felt like I was able to make my own choice regarding what it is that I believe. You can argue with me till you're blue in the face, but the fact of the matter is that when you are raised in the CofC, you DO NOT have a choice. What were my options? I could follow a different path, and leave the church, but that would have meant being disfellowshipped by my entire family. No support, no meals together, nothing but the constant effort to win me back. Does that sound appealing to anyone? It sounds painful and exhausting to me. (just ask my brother about my mother's persistence in reeling him back in...and she wonders why he never comes around! Go figure!) OR, I could dutifully get married young (we don't want any sex before marriage, so better to marry someone you're not really suited for and do it within the confines of that marriage, than to experience that taboo sin...and by the way, how are all those young marriages working out?) Have children, and be a good little stay at home, home schooling mommy in denim jumpers. Never mind if you're miserable, that's part of the sacrifice you make for Christ. News flash, people, SUFFERING'S NOT SUCH A BLESSING!!!! Now, of course, you're going to be inclined to tell me that we do not teach those things as doctrine, and if I made those choices, then it was of my own volition. Well, sure, of course they were. The fact that I was bombarded with "the woman's role in the church" guilted, and pushed by fear had nothing to do with the decisions I made as a teenager—decisions that would direct my entire life. All the ladies classes I attended that were centered around being a better wife and mother had no effect on me. All the books I was encouraged to read about lovingly beating my children and obeying my husband had no bearing on my psyche. It was my own free will that guided me. BS. If you don't think that the threat of disfellowship/loss of relationship is cult like behavior, OPEN your EYES. Blackmailing people by telling them that they'll embarrass their family, or worse yet, Go To HELL, isn't the most effective tool for winning souls, although, apparently it was enough to hold me for much longer than I could stand. Controlling people with fear and guilt only works so long before they become so jaded that they stop listening. —Or they become so complacent that all you have are a bunch of blind followers. Stop and look at my generation. Most of my peers have either left the church altogether, or are in a much more liberal CofC. Why do you think that is? I mean, you have the truth, so why are so many people rejecting your institution? Quoting Dr. Phil, "HOWS THAT WORKIN FOR YA?" It has been doubly hard for me because I have stayed here playing church for so long. Had I slipped out back when I was still single, this wouldn't even be an issue. But once you're in and committed, there's no turning back, un-

less you want a very public, bloody battle...it's what's happening now. Let me state this very clearly so that there is no question: I REFUSE to live a life ruled by a religious dogma that I do not fully agree with or embrace. I REFUSE to pretend anymore that I believe the CofC is the only way to salvation. And I REFUSE to live a life motivated by fear, guilt, angst, or any other negative emotion formerly used as a tool for my obedience. That is NOT what Jesus taught. I have spent way too much time as it is, beating myself up, trying to live up to the unattainable, and ever increasing standards that are being shoved down our throats at SW. I have left far too many Bible classes feeling like I would never measure up. Or, that there was no way I could ever live a life fully pleasing to Christ. I am breaking the pattern of brainwashing NOW, and will teach my children exactly what Christ taught...LOVE.

So, rumor has it that I've been attending the Church of Conscious Harmony. I'm using this opportunity to set the record straight. It's TRUE. I haven't become a member there, and will most likely attend other churches in the future. I will continue to try to compromise with Darryl in the interest of our children, but I will not compromise my own faith anymore. I have not turned away from God, or Christ's church, contrary to what you'll be told, but I have turned away from the man-made institution "The Church of Christ." The one that is run by men's egos and pride. The one that came into being far more recently than we like to admit, the one that breeds spawn like David Brown. The one that encourages people to get married young, make babies, and stay in that unhappy marriage, and then punishes them when they decide to get out. The one that is losing it's younger members in droves, because they no longer want to put up with having arbitrary rules made for them, and then imposed on them. The one that is so concerned about it's reputation in the brotherhood that is actually DIScourages it's own members from attending if they are even the slightest bit out of CofC line. —that is not a blanket statement... I have been discouraged from going back to SW, and I assure you that I will take that cue. Thank you for making it such an easy decision for me.

—Heather Sanders (11-13)

Was this not the attitude of the people Jeremiah dealt with? Notice their affirmation of faith: "How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: *thou art* a swift dromedary traversing her ways" (Jer. 2:23). The same judgment will befall this generation:

Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that *it is* an evil *thing* and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear *is* not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts (2:19).

Not only are we instructed to stand in the way and see, but also “ask for the way.” Duty is enjoined on every accountable person to seek after the good way. Jesus said it this way: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Mat. 7:7; cf. Heb. 11:6; Acts 17:27, et al.).

The text requires that we walk in that “way.” When we walk according to the Scriptures we have “light” to navigate the way (Psalms 119:105, 130). There are *legion* that claim to know the way and will gladly invite us to follow them. It requires diligence, devotion to His word, discernment, and above all a steadfast love for God to keep us in the true path to life eternal. Forget the blind guides and avoid their destiny. Listen to the Lord’s instructions and enjoy the “good way.”

REST FOR YOUR SOULS

We all know about the importance of rest for the body. When it comes to rest for the soul, we neglect a weightier subject. Rest for the soul can only be attained by a life that is harmonious with heaven. Jesus calls us to His rest: “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. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:28-30).

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah 6:16 ends on a sour note, a blatant refusal to hear and heed God’s Word. Okay, that was their choice and we know “the rest of the story.”

In *The Biblical Illustrator* on the text under the title: “The bugle call to rest” we find an interesting commentary on

CAUSES OF THE REJECTION OF RELIGION BY THE WORLDLY AND INCONSIDERATE.

1. A false estimate of themselves and of the evil and danger to which, in consequence of sin, they are exposed.
2. The unsuspected influence of evil habits, and the progressive and hardening tendency of unrepented sin. As Jeremy Taylor puts it: “Vice first is pleasing, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the man is impenitent, then he is obstinate, then he resolves never to repent, and then he dies.”
3. The injurious and delusive results of a false and formal profession of religion. Despair is a near neighbour of presumption. The system which is founded in fraud must end in delusion. It fails to satisfy, as it fails to sanctify.

4. Because the period is extremely short in which the voice of God, as a Saviour, can be heard at all. "Mercy is like the rainbow which God set in the clouds to remember mankind. It shines here as long as it is not hindered; but we must never look for it after it is night ("Homiletic" 153).

The question to every single one of us is the same: "Will you follow the old paths?" Will you learn from history or will you repeat the same mistakes? Will you accept God's gracious offer of rest? The alternative is not worthy of your consideration. We plead with you to ask for the old paths.

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PERPETUAL BACKSLIDING

JEREMIAH 8

Lester Kamp

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone familiar with the history of the nation of Israel is familiar with the concept of backsliding. When the Old Testament is read, it is obvious that the descendants of Jacob were never faithful for long. Soon after they left bondage in Egypt having seen the amazing powers of God in delivering them, protecting them from the powerful Egyptian army, and providing for them in every way, Israel turns to murmuring and complaining—and that repeatedly. Their failure to trust God and faithfully serve Him is a characteristic that can be seen in this people with amazing frequency.

As they made their way to Canaan for the first time, the history of this people is marred repeatedly by their frequent apostasies. The events at the foot of Sinai well illustrate the wavering of Israel. So soon after the fearfully obvious presence of God in the smoke, the cloud, the quaking of the mountain, the thunder and lightning, and the sound of the exceedingly loud trumpet so “all the people that *was* in the camp trembled” (Exo. 19:16), Israel was found at the foot of Sinai frolicking in the worship of the golden calf.

When the progeny of faithful Abraham arrived at Kadesh-Barnea, they turned away from reliance on God again and chose to believe the ten faithless spies instead of Joshua and Caleb. In spite of all they had seen (e.g., the daily presence of God in the cloud and pillar of fire and the daily provision of manna and quail), they refused to believe in Him and His ability to give them the “land of promise,” the “land which floweth with milk and honey” (Num. 14:8). Because of their lack of faith which produced their disobedience, all of them twenty years old and older when they departed Egypt died in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb.

The early history of Israel in the promised land again well illustrates their bent on backsliding. The period of the judges can be described as a time in which Israel left God, then was punished by God through some enemy, followed by their return to Him and their deliverance through a God-appointed judge. Even a quick reading of Judges will prove this to be true.

Israel’s desire for a physical king again evidenced their backsliding ways. They already had a king superior to all others, but they did not want God to “reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). They wanted an earthly king, 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” (8:20).

Many other examples could be given, but these should be enough to convince any objective observer that backsliding was an ongoing characteristic of these people. God stated through His prophet Hosea: “And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt *him*” (Hos. 11:7).

The Church and Backsliding

The church, spiritual Israel, “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), also often turns from God in apostasy by backsliding. Notice a few examples in the New Testament. Backsliding occurred early among the disciples of Jesus. When Jesus taught concerning eating His flesh and drinking His blood, many responded: “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60). The apostle John tells us that many disciples “went back, and walked no more with him” (6:66). Then Jesus even questioned the twelve: “Will ye also go away?” (6:67). Backsliding, apostasy, is possible. Backsliding occurs.

In the early church, backsliding occurred. Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Those who had obeyed the Gospel had now departed from it. Paul observes that this had “so soon” happened after they had received God’s grace.

In Paul’s writings to Timothy, there are several clear warnings about backsliding.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy.... 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 (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Backsliding often results from a slow, gradual process that begins with the failure to be watchful concerning the ever-present dangers about. Paul warned: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15). Peter also warned: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). When God’s people let their guards down and fail to recognize the enemy (Satan) and the dangers he causes, then backsliding can easily occur. Sometimes by simple neglect, by the failure to put up the resistance necessary to avoid the sin, apostasy happens. James admonished:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your hands*, ye sinners; and purify *your hearts*, ye double minded (4:7-8).

The Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah, sometimes called “the bravest, grandest man of Old Testament history,” dealt straightforwardly with backsliding in Judah. *Backslider* and *backsliding* occur about thirteen times in Jeremiah. The people were stiff-necked concerning the Word of God and their obligations to obey. The message of Jeremiah was a message of doom to those who continued their rebellious, backsliding ways. The desired

end was for the people to repent and return to God. “Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you” (Jer. 26:13).

The spiritual condition of the people was deplorable. We are told: “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?” (5:31). They were saying:

Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush (6:14-15).

But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.... This *is* a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth (7:24, 28).

THE CAUSES OF PERPETUAL BACKSLIDING

In chapter 8, Jeremiah gives us an insight into some of the causes of “perpetual backsliding.” Observe well his analysis. Backsliding is **preventable**. Knowing the causes of backsliding can help prevent its occurrence. God’s people today are not immune from this problem. Listen and learn from the prophet Jeremiah. Indeed: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Jeremiah wrote:

Why *then* is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, *but* they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD. How do ye say, *We are* wise, and the law of the LORD *is* with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he *it*; the pen of the scribes *is* in vain (Jer 8:5-8).

The first cause of “perpetual backsliding” noted in this passage is **perverted belief**. Jeremiah says that “they hold fast deceit” (8:5). These people were not interested in the truth; they loved lies (deceit). In fact, they did not want to hear the truth because it was unpleasant and made them feel uncomfortable. They preferred the prophets that prophesied

falsely above those who proclaimed the truth. Truth was available, but they did not like the truth. They wanted a message of peace when there was no peace. Isaiah described these people well: “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10).

Many who lived when Jesus was in the flesh were also this way:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved (John 3:19-20).

Because they did not want their sins exposed by the light of truth, they preferred the darkness of deceit (lies). Preaching “smooth things” is the way of deceit. Paul warned us of the tactics used by those who cause division in the Lord’s church: “For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile [deceive] the hearts of the innocent” (Rom. 16:18, ASV).

When a person no longer loves the truth, he has taken a giant step on his way to backsliding. Notice:

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).

The first step to believing lies is the failure to love the truth. When a person no longer loves the truth, he will believe anything that makes him feel good and feel comfortable in his sin.

The problem is not that there is no truth that pertains to the issues at hand (2 Pet. 1:3) or that the truth cannot be understood (John 8:32; Eph. 3:3-5)—the problem is that some people do not want to hear the truth. An essential part of having good ground (“an honest and good heart”) in which the seed of the Word of God can “bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15) is having a genuine love for the truth. When this love is present, “ye shall never fall” (2 Pet. 1:10), but if a person fails to love truth, backsliding is sure to come.

Second, Jeremiah says that “they spake not aright” (Jer. 8:6). Closely related to the first point is the fact that, when people do not want to hear the truth there are many who are willing and able to tell them what they want to hear, and many times these false teachers are the very

ones God has charged with the responsibility of teaching His people the truth. Notice again these words from Jeremiah:

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD (Jer. 23:1-2).

The very ones who were given the responsibility of guiding, instructing, and protecting God's people were responsible for destroying and scattering them. It was true in the days of Jeremiah; it is true in the New Testament church. Often those who bring the greatest harm to the church are those who are elders, preachers, Bible class teachers—the very ones which are supposed to be teachers and protectors of the flock of God. It should not surprise us that this is true. Paul spoke of this very possibility with the Ephesian elders: “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” (Acts 20:29-30). There are far too many elders who are allowing the wolves to devour the flock—and far too many elders have become wolves themselves and are leading astray the congregation which they are suppose to teach and protect. Many times the influence of these men extends far beyond the bounds of the congregation they serve because of the brotherhood-wide projects that they also oversee.

Another related point needs to be made here. When false teaching occurs, division (scattering) results. Those that cause division are never those who contend earnestly for the faith; those that cause division are those that teach, espouse, and fellowship error! Brethren, we are commanded by God to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). We cannot do otherwise and please God. We are to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). Notice *hardness* is part of being a good soldier—even a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Jesus warned about being deceived by those who pretend to be harmless sheep: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat. 7:15). Not everyone who claims to be a sheep is; not everyone who claims to be a shepherd is, either! All of us need to be alert and watchful lest we be deceived, even (especially) by those who have the responsibility

of guiding and protecting us. We need to heed the inspired advice of the apostle John: “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).

We are familiar with the “itching ears” referred to in 2 Timothy 4:3. Paul wrote:

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 (4:3-4).

Usually we think of those who will not endure sound doctrine as having those ears that need to be scratched, but it is also true that the false teachers have that same characteristic. They enjoy having their ears scratched, and are, therefore, willing to keep teaching the things that people enjoy. Because they do not want to risk losing their jobs, or losing revenue that is necessary for their *special projects* and interests, or losing their places of prominence in the brotherhood, they will not oppose sin and speak the truth. They are willing to wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

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 bitter! Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isa. 5:20-21).

The third characteristic of those who backslide is **indifference to sin**. Jeremiah refers to the fact that “no man repented” (8:6). The fiery Word of God was being preached among the people, but they would not listen. Jeremiah was definitely a “fire and brimstone” preacher. “Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (5:14). God’s desire and the purpose of Jeremiah’s preaching was to bring Judah to repentance, but “no man repented.” God’s people were hardened to the Word because of their sins. They no longer had honest and good hearts! Their hearts had become impervious to the Word of God because the practice of sin had become the dominating characteristic of their lives. In the parable of the sower, Jesus described such individuals as “wayside soil.” The wayside is the path that had been trampled by traffic so long that the soil had become hardened past the point where seed can penetrate and grow. Jesus said, “Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and

take away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). Rejection of God’s Word (perhaps through procrastination or the desire to continue in sin a while longer), hardens the heart and eventually causes it to become beyond repentance.

Similarly, Paul wrote of those “having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). His reference is to cauterized skin that is hard and dead to sensibility. These people are not sensitive to the truth; they no longer care about truth. They are unconcerned about distinguishing right from wrong; what they want to do and believe is right. These people could sit and listen to the preaching of the Word of God regularly for years without being disturbed about their own spiritual condition; to them it just does not matter. Paul’s description of the Gentiles of his day applies here:

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Eph. 4:18-19).

These people were past feeling, past understanding (i.e., they were blind) and past the ability to repent. Forgiveness always requires repentance. God is “longsuffering” in his dealings with man because he is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But the longsuffering of God will not permanently stave off his wrath. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb. 10:31). Judgment will be a terrible thing for those who, in this life, have refused to repent and obey God, and the judgment of God is certain. “But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (10:27). Some of the motivation in preaching comes from the realization of the wrath of God. Paul wrote of judgment and his motivation to preach:

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. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

However, some, because of the hardness of heart, are no longer able to repent and be saved. It was true in the time of Jeremiah, and it is true today. Notice carefully this inspired description of some in this circumstance:

For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and *then* fell away, **it is impossible 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, ASV).

Notice that those who were now unable to repent have not always been in that awful state. They were “once enlightened...and tasted the good Word of God.” Their hearts had not always been “past feeling.” Brethren, we need to realize that the condition of our hearts can change. Just because the *soil* of our heart has been “honest and good” (receptive to God’s Word) does not mean that it will continue to be such. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (3:13). It takes our effort to keep the soil of our hearts *cultivated* so the seed of the Word of God can grow in it. Fellowship with good, faithful brethren can also help.

It is also possible for hardened hearts to change and become receptive to the Word. Keep preaching the Word, “be instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). As the late Marshall Keeble put it: “Preach the Word when people like and when they don’t like it.” God through Ezekiel wrote:

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (11:19-20).

The only hope of improving the condition of heart is by preaching “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Do not water it down; do not avoid parts of it; do not alter it in any way—preach the Word!

Even when God told Isaiah that the response from the people to whom he was commissioned to preach would not listen, Isaiah’s responsibility was to preach God’s message and to preach that same message until the land was unoccupied. Listen to God’s words to Isaiah as He sent him to preach:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses

without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and *there be* a great forsaking in the midst of the land (Isa. 6:9-12).

Fourth, Jeremiah referred to the **selfishness** (self-centeredness) of the people. “Every one turned to his course” (8:6). Self-centeredness always leads to apostasy. Self-denial is vital to being God’s people. Our biggest problem in our relationship with God is always self. When we think too much of ourselves, we think too little of God.

When people begin to place too much importance on what “I think,” as Naaman did in 2 Kings 5:11, they are denying themselves of the blessings that come only from obeying God. What would have happened to Naaman had his thoughts remained more important than the instructions of God and he had gone back to Syria? We know that would have been the wrong choice, and his leprosy would not have been healed. We should also realize that any time we elevate **our** own thinking, **our** own preferences, **our** own convenience, **our** family, **our** own pet projects, **our** own position, or **our** own popularity (even if it is just imagined) above the Word of God, apostasy is certain.

Self-centeredness was common in Israel. We are familiar with the statement about Israel especially in the days of the judges. “Every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes” (Jud. 21:25). Left to himself without an absolute, unchanging standard, man can (and will) justify everything that he wants to do. This is a common practice in the world today, and far too common in the church. The reason that people can justify—at least in their own minds—fellowship with error is that they think of themselves and their pet brotherhood projects more highly than they ought. It no longer matters to them what God has said; it only matters what they want to do. These people, like those in the days of Jeremiah, are going to do what they want to do in spite of what the Word of God clearly teaches.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

Pride often gets in the way of repentance. Humility is necessary for one to admit he is wrong. Repentance is always required by God for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 8:22). The greater men are in their own eyes, the harder it is for them to repent. Think of the great works in the Lord’s kingdom which are no longer worthy of the support of the

faithful, because of the unwillingness of some to repent and of others for upholding them (fellowshipping them) without repentance! Most of these men know better! They have been valiant proclaimers of God's Word until the obligations of God's Word affected their friendships (buddyhood), favorite schools and projects, sources of income for self and/or projects, and their own *positions* and *popularity* (places of honor and opportunities to speak on *big events*). "Everyone turned to his course" could well be applied to many today who have caused the present distress in the Lord's church.

There have always been some who, because of their own perceived importance, try to convince others that they should listen only to them. Diotrephes is the example given in the New Testament of such an individual. He loved "to have the preeminence" among the brethren (3 John 9). It should also be noted that because of his self-centeredness he refused to receive those who were faithful and loyal only to God ("receiveth us not"). The way in which John described the tactics of Diotrephes and his loyal fans sounds all too familiar concerning the methods being used today against those who would oppose such and stand upon the Word of God alone.

Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church (3 John 10).

Jesus stated clearly: "And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Fifth, Jeremiah refers to the **ignorance** of the people regarding the Word of God. "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD" (Jer. 8:7). Notice that Jeremiah indicated that the people knew lots of things, but they failed to know "the judgment of the Lord." They were living their lives as if there was not going to be a day of reckoning before God. We can be certain that, as sure as we live, there will be a day in which we will give account before God concerning our lives. We may be able to fool ourselves into believing that we can get away with disobeying God—we may be able to even fool others into thinking that

what we are doing in violation of God's Word really does not matter—but one day all will stand before God.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds.... For there is no respect of persons with God.... In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel (Rom. 2:6, 11, 16).

It is obvious that the “judgment of the Lord” is going to be according to the standard of God's Word, for those living since the cross it will be by the Gospel. Jesus put it this way: “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). Faithful service to God demands knowledge of that standard by which we all ultimately will be judged. On that day of judgment, no portion of the Word of God will be left out though some in life have tried to act as if certain portions of the Bible do not matter or are not there. Ignorance of God's Word is not acceptable for in that day ignorance of the Bible will not excuse.

To walk in the light, we must come to the light. We must study diligently the Word of God. Ignorance of God's Word is a certain cause of backsliding. We cannot discern the difference between truth and error if we do not know the truth. God said through Hosea: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). It is a fact that we can know much without knowing that which really matters—the Word of God. We can have high degrees from institutions of higher learning, but unless we know and do the Word of God, it matters not. Those described by Jeremiah knew many things, but they failed to know the judgment of God.

Last, Jeremiah described this perpetually backsliding people as those who had **vain self-confidence**. He wrote: “How do ye say, We *are* wise, and the law of the LORD *is* with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he *it*; the pen of the scribes *is* in vain” (8:8). Their attitude was, “We are wise,” and no one can tell us what to do. They thought that they had arrived at the point that they no longer needed reproof or rebuke. They thought they were intellectually superior and superior to all others.

Paul warned: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Backsliding occurs when we begin to think that we cannot fall. The truth is that we all can backslide. It takes constant effort on our part to avoid backsliding; it takes constant

re-evaluation of our relationship with God in light of the teaching of God's Word. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Even the great apostle Paul realized that he could fall: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). Notice Paul's reference to one of the reasons that his thorn in the flesh was given to him and was not removed: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. 12:7). If we think we are too wise to fall away from the faithful service to God, we have deceived ourselves.

It should be obvious as we remember our recent history that numerous ones who served the Lord faithfully for many years, left the Lord and became enemies of truth. We could name their names (e.g., James D. Bales, Buster Dobbs, etc.).

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:19-21).

CONCLUSION

Should we not heed these warnings? Can we not recognize many of these characteristics of backsliding within the church? It may be later than we think. What is needed today is what God sent Jeremiah to do—boldly preach the Word of God and call men to repentance without fear or favor. We (like Jeremiah) weep over the condition of the people of God today, but we (like Jeremiah) will continue to preach though it be unpopular among men, for we know that our service is to God. We can do nothing less.

WORK CITED

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

JEREMIAH'S GETHSEMANE

JEREMIAH 20:9

Darrell Broking

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INTRODUCTION

It is hard to imagine the trials and tribulations through which Jeremiah went. Jeremiah suffered much for the glory of God. Because he was willing to tell the people of Judah the Word of the Lord, Jeremiah was rejected by his family, friends, the leaders of his people, and the people of Judah in general. The severity of his trials included death threats, incarceration in horrid conditions, physical abuse, and trials from which truth lovers have thus far been spared in modern America. One of the wonderful aspects of the book of Jeremiah is that it reveals enough of Jeremiah's life that it offers hope to brethren who have not always been living sacrifices for the Master. As this essay unfolds, consideration will be given to the wavering of Jeremiah which ceased when Jeremiah met God in His Garden of Gethsemane, and a challenge for all of God's people who waver to do likewise.

TIME TO BEGIN

When it was time to begin his work, Jeremiah was uncertain of his abilities. He was quick to inform the Lord that he lacked the ability to speak for Him because he was a "child" (Jer. 1:6). The age of Jeremiah when he was called is uncertain. The duration of his work suggests that

he was about twenty years old. Because the ark was no longer being transported from place to place, David lowered the age of service from thirty to twenty years of age (1 Chr. 23:24-26). This too suggests that Jeremiah was at least twenty years old because he was of priestly origin and worked among the priests of Anathoth (Jer. 11:23). As a young man of about twenty years of age, Jeremiah was not convinced that he had the ability to speak as a prophet.

Was Jeremiah's youthful hesitation based on observations he made as he was reared? Were younger prophets disregarded and the recipients of disrespect? How were the prophets to whom Jeremiah was exposed during his boyhood treated? It may be the case that comments Jeremiah heard from his family, friends, and the religious leaders of his day helped Jeremiah believe that at his age he would have nothing to offer. Additionally, Jeremiah might have had a limited understanding about how his people would treat a faithful prophet of the Lord. Regardless, the Lord did not share Jeremiah's view. Jeremiah's perceived inability to speak would be overcome by speaking all that God would command him to speak and by addressing all of the people to whom he would be sent (1:7). The answer to Jeremiah's fear was to trust in God explicitly (1:8), which Jeremiah failed to do during the first stage of his work.

At times young people who speak out for the Lord find themselves being overlooked by those who have gone on before them. It can be difficult for those who have been around God's Word for a number of years to accept teaching from one who is still "wet behind the ears." Paul instructed Timothy to work in a manner that would not be hindered by his youthfulness: "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat *him* as a father; *and* the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-2). In another place he wrote, "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" (4:12). Age does not guarantee soundness. Remember the old prophet who lied to the young prophet and assisted in his demise (1 Kin. 13)? Soundness is the result of submitting to God regardless of one's age. Young men who want to live according to the Truth and speak where the Lord has spoken deserve the respect and support of their brethren.

When the Lord commissioned Jeremiah, He sat him "over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to

destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Ezekiel serves as an inspired commentary on this process; he was placed in the prophetic position of a “watchman” charged with uttering the Lord’s warnings to the people (Eze. 3). The men of Judah failed to heed the message; therefore, based upon the Lord’s Word, Jerusalem and the nations about her were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Eze. 4-32). Ezekiel 33 is similar to Ezekiel 3—the difference being that chapter three begins the negative aspect of tearing down and rooting out the error of the people. Ezekiel 33 begins a new section in which the beautification process of hope begins to shine forth. Jeremiah’s call is also similar to the charge given to Gospel preachers: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Notice that in both passages the so-called negatives outnumber the so-called positives two to one. Before the seed can grow in a person’s heart, the ideas and philosophies of unrighteousness need to be destroyed.

Few people are willing to make a total and complete commitment to the Lord. People who are unwilling to make a total commitment to the Lord but want to pretend that they are faithful to God, have a way of making life difficult for faithful messengers of the Lord. This is challenging for any preacher of the Word. Too often congregations of our Lord’s people would rather have big numbers, a large contribution, and a reputation among men than to have a faithful preacher of the Word of God in the pulpit. All of that “rooting out,” “pulling down,” “throwing down,” and “destroying” is much too uncomfortable for people who refuse to make a total commitment to the Lord.

One of the traits of youth is that young people tend to go through a fantasy stage. During this stage of development, there is an unrealistic understanding of how life is really going to be. The zeal of youth, when coupled with the truth of God’s Word, sometimes feels that it can answer all of the maladies of life. It assumes that others will want to share in the discovery of truth and that they will thereby accumulate traveling companions down the Highway of Holiness. As the Lord delivered His Word to the prophet, Jeremiah “found” them and “ate” them and said, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer. 15:16). Because Jeremiah “found” God’s Word, it is understood that he was in search of the Word of the Lord

(cf. Mat. 7:7). Jeremiah was obviously one who did “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (5:6), and he ate and was satisfied. In his youth Jeremiah failed to comprehend the reality of the day. He soon learned exactly how unwilling his people were to listen to the message, about which he was so excited, and that they were also set on silencing him by any means they could.

THE DECEPTION

When the energetic young prophet started his work, he began to learn a hard lesson in life. The majority of humanity is extremely comfortable living in sin and devising new and exciting ways to transgress God's law. Furthermore, to the unjust the just are unjust. This is exactly how the majority of God's people in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's day thought: “Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal” (Eze. 33:17). When Jeremiah began his work, he did not fully understand what would be required of him or the continued diligence that was necessary to remain faithful to the Lord.

Jeremiah was diligent in that he took God's Word to his people. Jeremiah preached in the courts of the Temple (Jer. 7:2), just as preachers today preach the Word of God when Christians assemble to worship. Unlike some preachers today, Jeremiah was not content to limit his preaching to the place whereat people came to worship. He went where the Lord sent him. Jeremiah took God's Word to the people at the gates of the city (17:19). He took the message to the people. He also preached in the king's palace (22:1-2; 37:17), in prison (32:1-2, 6-8; 33:1-9), and even to the valley of the son of Hinnom where the Jews sacrificed their children in the fire to Baal (19:1-2). He preached the Word of the Lord to those living in the depths of sin.

Jeremiah did his part to get the Word of the Lord out to the people of Judah. How did the people of Judah respond to Jeremiah's work and to the love he extended to them? They refused to walk in the Lord's path and to heed His warnings (6:16-17). They responded to Jeremiah's preaching by mocking him (20:7). Jeremiah was abused physically because of his preaching (20:2). He was arrested and sent to jail (32:2), and his character was assassinated (37:12-15). The aforementioned verses are just a few samplings of the nature of Jeremiah's sufferings. The people of Judah hated the Truth, and thus they hated Jeremiah. His neighbors, family, friends, the priests and prophets, and the evil kings

under whose reign Jeremiah served hated him (11:19-21, 12:6; 20:1-6, 10; 26:8-9; 36:23).

One can only imagine how hard it must have been for Jeremiah as he began his work. Imagine, after having tasted of the good Word of the Lord, the young prophet full of zeal set out to do the Lord's work and as he did, he was hatred, ridiculed, and abused. Jeremiah's own family turned against him! Apparently, his family worked against him and devised schemes in which he could be taken, and they gathered men together against Jeremiah. As they were working against him, they appeared to be his friend to his face. "For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee" (12:6). These fair words may be part of the reason why Jeremiah began to travel down the road to apostasy.

Jeremiah, like many today, wanted to stand with the Lord and obey His will, but when he realized that his family and friends opposed the truth, he wanted to find a way to resolve the problem. The Lord had already told the men of Judah what to do to resolve the problem: "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*" (6:16). When they rejected the Lord's offer of resolution, there was nothing that anyone else could do to help them out of their impending destruction. The total disregard for God during Jeremiah's day is noted in Jeremiah 5:1:

Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be *any* that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.

The fact that the Lord did not issue a pardon reveals the depth of the problem.

Jeremiah found himself in dire straits. He certainly loved his family and friends. Sometimes it is easier to point out sin and discuss the Lord's judgment with people to whom we are not connected by *phileo* love. *Phileo* differs from *agapao* inasmuch as *agapao* seeks the best for others and *phileo* is a kindred spirit toward another. James said that Abraham was the "friend" of God (Jam. 2:23). "Friend" (*philos*) is the noun form of *phileo*. It is of further interest to note that the Greek word translated "love their husbands" and the Greek word "love their

children” in Titus 2:4 are both compound words build around the word *phileo*. Some people see Peter as lacking the love that he should have had for the Lord because when Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him (*agapao*). Peter responded, “Lord; thou knowest that I love [*phileo*] thee” (John 21:15). Is it not the case that Peter wanted the Lord to know that he loved him deeply as kindred and a friend. It is harder to practice *phileo* than it is to practice *agapao*! Jeremiah had that *phileo* connection with many in Judah, and he allowed the emotional bond he had with his family and friends to cloud his better judgment.

Paul wrote, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1). God has always desired that His people pray for others, or has He? “If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:16). God’s people may not pray for people to be spared from the consequences of their sins when they will not repent of their sins! Likewise, God instructed Jeremiah not to pray for his people: “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee” (Jer. 7:16). Jeremiah must have been praying for his people. Naturally, he did not want them to experience the hardship, suffering, death, and humiliation that the Lord had ordered for them; so he prayed for them. One of the more disciplined acts of Christianity is to stand in total agreement with God. Some people explain atonement as “at-one-ment” (that is, the state of being one with God). How can a man be *one* with God if he does not agree with all that God teaches in His Word? “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The answer is a resounding **no**! Jeremiah was not able to stand with God while he was offering intercessory petitions to God on behalf of people who had no regard for God and His Word. God even warned Jeremiah a second time to stop praying for his people: “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear *them* in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble” (Jer. 11:14).

Brethren sometimes justify their unauthorized associations by saying that they are trying to bring the erring back to the right way of the Lord. Anyone who has been around the church for any length of time, with his eyes and ears opened, has heard the same. It is impossible to

bring people out of their error without actively teaching them about their sin and how to get out of it. If the erring choose not to repent, then it is time to move on. Notice the similarities and differences between 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul said that the “unruly” (the Greek noun *ataktos*) are to be warned, and in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 he said that the church is to withdraw from every brother who walks “disorderly” (the Greek adverb *ataktos*). Did Paul contradict himself? Absolutely not! The disorderly are to be warned and if they fail to heed the warning fellowship is to be withdrawn from them (cf. Tit. 3:10). This is a great act of biblical love.

In the 1 Corinthians epistle, Paul addressed a number of doctrinal problems with the Corinthian congregation. Liberals love to use this letter as alleged evidence that congregations practicing error are still faithful and accepted before God. They fail to acknowledge that Paul wrote his letter to correct the Corinthians’ doctrinal problems and warned the brethren that, if they failed to repent, he would deal with them accordingly. Paul delayed his trip to Corinth to allow his brethren some time to repent (2 Cor. 1:23). By the time Paul wrote the 2 Corinthian epistle, the brethren had addressed part of their error (2 Cor. 2). He warned the remainder that those who failed to repent before he arrived in Corinth would not be spared (13:2). Notice that Paul warned, allowed some time for study, and then set out to discipline those who would not repent. This is the biblical pattern for helping brethren out of error, and when this pattern is followed, it is not likely that the brother who attempts to restore the erring will join hands with the brother in his error. Additionally, it does not take years to deal with those in error. If God’s people would stand together upon God’s platform of unity and refuse to extend fellowship to brethren in error, regardless of their notoriety, the church would be able to go forward without all of the division it is experiencing today. Influential false teachers like Dave Miller would be motivated to repent because the faithful following God’s pattern for restoring the erring would never allow them to work with an apologetics group, or any other work, while in sin.

Lest one think that the previous paragraph is some idealistic fantasy, please note that God made this case to Jeremiah:

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings (Jer. 23:21-22).

Had Jeremiah's fellow prophets stood on God's Word as a united group of God-fearing men, they would have changed the people of Judea for their good. The only way that faithful brethren can make a difference in the church is to stand united on God's pattern and refuse to allow false teachers to have one inch of ground upon which to stand and influence anyone. When men fail to follow the pattern, they gravitate toward error and eventually succumb to it. Paul warned the Corinthians that "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). How did the Corinthians get into error in the first place? They failed to follow the pattern and allowed evil communications to corrupt them.

For a time, Jeremiah failed to stand as one with God. This is evident because after God explicitly rebuked Jeremiah for praying for the people, Jeremiah went on to offer up an intercessory prayer for his people:

O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou *it* for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man *that* turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astounded, as a mighty man *that* cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, *art* in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not (14:7-9).

Jeremiah knew that God was punishing the people because of their sins. While this must have been painful for Jeremiah, he knew better than to violate God's Word, but he was drawn to his people by the strong bond of *phileo* love that he had for them. He allowed his subjective emotions to drive him away from God and closer to his own demise. Our loving God then rebuked Jeremiah again: "Pray not for this people for *their* good" (14:11). This rebuke tells us what Jeremiah was doing. He was not praying for his people to repent and be restored according to the Lord's plan, he was praying for their good in spite of their sin. The Lord further stated: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, *yet* my mind *could* not *be* toward this people: cast *them* out of my sight, and let them go forth" (15:1). God cannot fellowship men who refuse to abide in His teaching!

Jeremiah began his work full of zeal and excitement. He was hungry for the truth and obviously wanted his brethren to accept it. Having the Lord's promise for protection, Jeremiah set forth to do God's will, but what he found was not what he expected. The trials and suffering he

endured were not what he expected and more than he believed he could handle. The rejection of the truth, even in his own community and by his own family, was almost more than he could bear. Jeremiah later told God: “O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived” (20:7). God’s people enter into their labor for the Lord with ideas of how it will be and how God will take care of them. Some do not believe that they will have to suffer for the cause of Christ, and others think that they do not have the ability to suffer for Jesus. They soon learn that reality and ideals are difficult to reconcile. God will always take care of those who put him first in their lives. However, God takes care of His people in His own way and according to His own time schedule. Christians must learn to wait on the Lord.

REPENT OR PERISH

Jeremiah disobeyed God. He did not want to see the destruction the Lord promised and tried to find a compromise for Judah’s problem. When God’s will on any matter is set in concrete, there is no way to circumvent it. It does not matter how strong one’s emotional bond is to people who are in sin, God will not be moved to change his mind because of how His people feel about others. One of the greatest assets to possessing the book of Jeremiah is that it is real to life and offers hope to brethren who have gravitated away from God toward people living in sin.

The Lord warned Jeremiah not to allow the people to sway him away from the truth: “Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them” (1:17). *Dismayed* and *confound* are from the same Hebrew word. God told Jeremiah that he was not to break down before the people or the Lord Himself would break Jeremiah. Jeremiah obviously did not believe that he would get to the point that God would stand ready to break him. Remember that he was deceived! How many people do you know who set out to be faithful to Jesus and later went into liberalism or abandoned the faith in some other manner? People who come to Christ in faithful obedience do not just wake up one morning and say: “Today I think I will go into liberalism.” How many children say: “I want to go to prison when I grow up” or “I want to be a heroin addict when I get older”? Change usually begins with small compromises that accelerate with time. When one of God’s people gives in on any matter of Jesus’ teaching, no matter how

small a matter he believes it to be, he is in the process of departing from the living God!

Jeremiah changed, and, in that condition, he was an additional problem for Judah. Also, he was quickly becoming another useless prophet as far as the Lord was concerned. It needs to be understood that Jeremiah was not steeped deeply into error like the other prophets and religious leaders of his day. Jeremiah said to the Lord:

I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, *which* refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, *and as waters that fail?* (15:17-18).

Would to God that many of my brethren would acknowledge the point made here. Jeremiah did not run with the pack in their error, he just tried to find a way to allow the people to be spared without their obedience. He was in pain because he spoke the truth and because he knew what was coming. How many preachers today will lose their souls because, while they preach the Truth and would never dream of running with the liberals in their error, they refuse to use their influence to see their erring brethren restored according to the pattern of the New Testament? Why is it so hard for some to understand that men in error cannot be helped without teaching them about their error and refusing to fellowship them until they repent? It is impossible to *love* another back into obedience without telling that person the truth of his condition and helping that person gravitate toward the platform of biblical fellowship instead of the reverse happening. Jeremiah never would have dreamed of sitting in the assembly of the mockers, but because he did not do his work exactly like the Lord instructed him, he was quickly moving in that direction. There is no substitute for the manner in which God instructs His people to do their work. Jeremiah disobeyed God, made intercession for the people of Judah, and thereby gravitated away from God toward the people.

God warned Jeremiah to "be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them" (1:17). This almost happened. God almost broke Jeremiah before the people because of his disobedience. Who would deny that Jeremiah was anything but sincere and loving? He loved his people and wanted to find some way to help them. He needed to learn that God's method for dealing with men in error is the only way to help them. Men might not always understand why the Lord wants a

thing done in a certain manner. Rest assured that God knows exactly what needs to happen and why. God's people need to understand that they are not smarter than God, and they cannot improve God's plan.

In addition to Jeremiah's unauthorized intercession for the people, he also misunderstood the Lord's promise of protection. Who wants to suffer? Suffering goes against human nature. God's promise was not that Jeremiah would be exempt from suffering but that God would take care of him in a manner that would allow Jeremiah to go forward with his work. Consider the words of Peter: "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). Suffering for the cause of Christ is a natural consequence of being loyal to King Jesus. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). As noted by Paul, suffering for the cause of Christ actually provides an opportunity for the Lord's faithful ones to receive God's stamp of approval: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19).

Jeremiah certainly went through much more than he ever dreamed he would have to endure. I know of Christians who have suffered because they determined to be faithful to Jesus regardless of what anyone else wanted to do. Some have suffered more than others, but what preacher in this country's history could compare his suffering to Jeremiah's. Josiah's reign began in about 640 B.C. Jeremiah began his work in the 13th year of Josiah's reign, which was about 627 B.C. (Jer. 1:2-3). The final siege of Jerusalem and deportation took place in 586 B.C. and he was still going strong. After 41 years of hard rigorous labor, Jeremiah had only suffering to show for his work. He suffered in ways we could not fathom. During the first stage of his work he did not handle his suffering as he needed to, either.

While it may seem a little strange to some, those who have suffered and at the same time wanted to maintain a close connection to the very people who are the problem understand Jeremiah's situation. Up until Jeremiah 12, he had been praying for the people, but he stopped praying for them at that time. During this stage of his work, he prophesied doom for the people. In Jeremiah 12:4, he ceased praying for his people because they said that he would not see their end. Jeremiah had been preaching doom, and the people were growing weary of his message; they began with their death threats. At that juncture, Jeremiah began to

experience his work in a new way. Then in Jeremiah 14, he gravitated toward the people again and made intercession for them. When he was rebuked, he attempted to justify his sin because the people of Judah were deceived and did not know any better: "Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place" (14:13). Clearly the masses were deceived because of the united front put forth by the false prophets. The fact that they were deceived did not justify their doomed condition or excuse Jeremiah's disobedience.

Likewise today, many congregations fellowship Dave Miller and those who rally behind him because they are deceived by their preachers—who rule by their means. The people in those congregations may choose to listen to their preachers instead of doing their homework and learning the issues involved. Those congregations bear their own guilt just as the people who rejected Jeremiah bore theirs. God had already informed Jeremiah about the problem, which he used as an excuse in Jeremiah 14:13. "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?" (5:31). People often refuse to get the facts and study them because they like things just the way they are.

Because Jeremiah was gravitating toward the people, the Lord rebuked him and called for him to repent:

Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, *and* thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them (15:19).

Jeremiah finally arrived at the point at which he never dreamed of arriving. He sincerely wanted to help his people, but his sincerity was evil because it was channeled in a manner that had not been authorized by the Lord. The prophet was at a crossroads and was about to go over to the people. He decided to repent and move back to a faithful standing with the Lord. He cried to the Lord: "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou *art* my praise" (17:14). Jeremiah stated further:

Be not a terror unto me: thou *art* my hope in the day of evil. Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded: let them be dismayed, but let not me be dismayed: bring upon them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction (17:17-18).

Jeremiah acknowledged that he was about to be “confounded,” or “dismayed” (i.e. *broken* before the people). Thus, Jeremiah made the decision not to be destroyed with the people of Judah!

Jeremiah was still weak and fighting the temptation to stop preaching the Word. The persecution and suffering Jeremiah faced seemed to be more than he could bear, but it helped him see the people of Judah for what they really were. Their “fair words” (12:6) may have influenced Jeremiah for a time; however, as Jeremiah continued to tell people the truth, their ugly and hateful response helped Jeremiah to see just how wretched his people were. Jeremiah went before the Lord in regard to the people again but not to offer intercession:

Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, *and* to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their *blood* by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and *be* widows; and let their men be put to death; *let* their young men *be* slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay *me*: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal *thus* with them in the time of thine anger (18:19-23).

Jeremiah finally agreed with God and never gravitated back to the people again. From that moment onward Jeremiah stood in agreement with God.

JEREMIAH’S GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Jeremiah began his work as a deceived man. He was deceived because he failed to understand the full ramifications of how the people would react to his preaching. He did not believe that he had the ability to do the work he was commissioned to do (1:6). When he tasted the Word of God, he loved it and in his youthful zeal he probably assumed that he would be able to get others to gravitate toward his lofty stand on God’s Word (15:15-17). However, that did not happen. Life became unbearable for Jeremiah. The Lord even forbade him to take a wife, because the times in which he worked were not conducive to family life (Jer. 16, cf. 1 Cor. 7:1, 26).

Things got so bad for Jeremiah that he considered getting out of his prophetic work. He almost did what so many do today. When faced

with the laborious task of learning the truth on the issues of the day and then standing against those who oppose the pattern of New Testament Christianity, many choose to stand aloof from it all and remain silent. There has never been a time when God has blessed this mentality. Notice God's position in regard to those who decide to stay out of the battle for the high ground of truth:

"Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty" (Jud. 5:23).

"In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou *wast* as one of them" (Oba. 1:11).

Jesus said:

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mat. 12:30).

It is never acceptable to be a pacifist in the Lord's army! God's people will either fight against the enemy or join the enemy, but passive they will never be.

The Garden of Gethsemane was a place of intense suffering and agony for our Lord. Jesus knew about the horrible death that He would suffer. He knew that the physical pain would be excruciating. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). The mental aspect of suffering was a tremendous burden our Lord had to bear. Of this condition, Paul Taylor wrote:

Although this medical condition is relatively rare, according to Dr. Frederick Zugibe (Chief Medical Examiner of Rockland County, New York) it is well-known, and there have been many cases of it. The clinical term is "*hematohidrosis*." "Around the sweat glands, there are multiple blood vessels in a net-like form." Under the pressure of great stress the vessels constrict. Then as the anxiety passes "the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture. The blood goes into the sweat glands." As the sweat glands are producing a lot of sweat, it pushes the blood to the surface—coming out as droplets of blood mixed with sweat (Taylor).

The humanity of our Lord is seen in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus did not want to suffer the physical death that was in store for Him. He prayed to His Father: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). If

there was just another way to accomplish the redemption of humanity, but alas there was no other way. At Gethsemane Jesus made it absolutely clear that He was willing to suffer whatever He would have to face to accomplish the will of the Father. Jesus was in total and complete submission to the will of the Father, and when He arose from Gethsemane, He went forth and faced the trial for which He had prepared from eternity (Rev. 13:8).

Jeremiah 20 begins with the prophet being beaten by Pashur one of the chief men of the Temple. Apparently Pashur heard about Jeremiah's broken bottle message as noted in chapter 19 and wanted him to stop preaching his *negative* message. This is the first time that Jeremiah was arrested for his work. It is also of interest to note that Jeremiah 20:2 is the first time in the book that he is called "the prophet." By Jeremiah 20, he was finally doing what the Lord knew that he could and would do. Jeremiah endured his trial and stood against Pashur without any hesitation. He told Pashur that his name was now called "Magorm-issabib" (terror is about). Pashur would be a terror to himself and to his friends. Additionally, the imprisoned tells the captor that his lot is captivity. Pashur would live in a strange land among those to whom he lied until his death.

Pashur was a priest; therefore, he and Jeremiah were family. Jeremiah did not gravitate toward his family this time; he was straight-forward and to the point with God's message for Pashur. Beaten and in stocks was not how Jeremiah envisioned his life as a prophet. Additionally, he endured the hardship of his trial, which he formally doubted his ability to do. Thus he told the Lord: "O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me" (20:7). Jeremiah's condition was that he was a daily laughing stock. His condition was caused by preaching the truth of God's Word (20:8). That kind of treatment will make a person either stand up for God or shut up. He finally settled into the reality of his work and made the conscious decision to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way and to fully trust the Lord for His guidance. He explained his transformation in Jeremiah 20:9, which has been called Jeremiah's Garden of Gethsemane, because it is a record of the pivotal point in his life at which he realized that he could and would accomplish the will of God for his life.

Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jeremiah resolved himself to accomplish the Lord's will regardless of the consequences. He tried to hold back God's Word, but he grew weary of standing aloof and could do it no more. Jeremiah did not know about all of the trials that were in front of him, but he knew that he would face them by the help that God supplied. After Jeremiah 20, he is never again seen in the light of compromise. He met God in his garden of decision and surrendered to God's will.

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah was a great prophet of God. He made his share of mistakes, but as he matured in his relationship with God, he developed an attitude that is exemplary for all of God's people. Most people do not enter into a relationship with God thinking about all of the trials and tribulations that they will face if they stand faithful to God's cause. Jeremiah obviously underestimated the severity of his fate and his ability to perform his work. For a time he did what many do under similar conditions: he compromised and gravitated toward the people. Therefore, God almost destroyed him before the people. How sad that would have been.

One of the wonderful qualities of Jeremiah was his willingness to repent and seek the healing that only God can supply. He repented and stood up for God with unwavering zeal and steadfastness. Therein lies the lesson for members of the Lord's church. Christians are people who have made a total commitment to Christ and who walk with Him. As Jeremiah 20:9 is Jeremiah's Garden of Gethsemane, Romans 12:1 is to be the Christian's.

In that verse Paul urged the brethren by the mercy of God. The apostle did not say that, when a Christian offers himself to God, he must burn the body as the pagans thought (Crouch). They were not to kill themselves, but they were to present their bodies to God in total commitment to God as a living sacrifice. Spiritual service implies rational and logical service, which is very logical in light of the cross of Christ. This is not a generated emotional response but a way of life with those who are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek *paristemi* is used in Romans 12:1 as the language of sacrifice, meaning to offer (Bauer 628). Instead of the sacrifice of Romans 12:1 being executed physically, it is to be a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice (Morris 434). This concept parallels the discussion of Romans 6:1-6 and focuses on the new creature's life being dedicated to God.

Outside of the indicative mood, time is not a feature of the aorist tense. In Romans 12:1 the verbal action is expressed by the infinitive “to offer,” and the action is expressed in the aorist tense to communicate the completion of the process. A similar concept is found in Galatians 3:10 where the aorist infinitive *poiéo*, “to do,” expresses the idea of completing the action, which herein is keeping the Mosaic Law. Because no man can keep the Law and accomplish its demands, anyone who seeks justification under the Law is under a curse. In the Romans passage, Paul told the brethren who were going back into the world “to offer” themselves as a living sacrifice, meaning that they needed to go all the way and give themselves to God. They needed to take a Jeremiah-like stand and go forward without wavering! A similar thought is expressed in Romans 14:13 where Paul wrote to those who had already put on Christ (Gal. 3:27) and said: “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14). There was an obvious lack of commitment among some of the brethren in Rome.

Zosan (alive) is a present active accusative feminine singular participle. Its usage in Romans 12:1 is adjectival not adverbial. In this construction it appears to be a predicate participle, which asserts something about the noun it modifies. A predicate participle does not have an article, as is the case here and *zosan* follows *thusian*, an accusative feminine noun that *zosan* modifies, which is more emphatic than would it be in the attributive position; thus, “offer your bodies a sacrifice—alive, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable divine service” (Wallace 618). The adjectival aspect of the participle is the focus here not its adverbial side. Accordingly, the present tense is not looking at a continuation of time any more than the present tense participle in Mark 6:14 is looking at a continuation of time. Notice the attributive participle in Mark 6:14: “to baptize” is a present tense participle, but here it functions as an attributive adjective modifying *Ioannes*, meaning John the Baptizer not John who continually baptizes. Additionally, the material recorded in Mark 6:14 transpired after John was dead! The point in Romans 12:1 is that the death in the sacrifice is not the sinner’s physical life, but his life to sin (Rom. 6:2-6, 7). What is the forgiven person? He is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17): a sacrifice—alive, holy, acceptable to God, a son of God, a priest—he is all these things but he is not a practicing sinner. As Peter said: “that we, being dead to sins, should

live unto righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Romans 12:1 teaches that Christians are to die to sin and to live for Christ!

God expects all of His people to make that decision to be stable in Christ and do His will regardless of what anyone else is doing. To die to the world and to live every moment for Christ is to make that Garden of Gethsemane transition and go forward as an unwavering, stalwart, soldier of the cross of Christ. Those who make this decision get to go on to heaven and be with Christ forevermore. Those who fail to make the transition to total commitment for Christ will be forever lost. Christians make mistakes and waver sometimes. God's patience allows His people to make the changes they need to make to be saved. Where do you stand? Are you for God or aloof from God and thereby against Him? Remember that brethren who are not abounding in the work of the Lord are dying (1 Cor. 15:58). Brethren who fail to have a working faith that diligently comes to God (Heb. 11:6) are in the process of departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). If you are drifting away from God, will you not go to your garden of decision and make a total commitment to serve Christ!

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THE NEW COVENANT

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting subjects to contemplate in the Scriptures is the study of "covenants." Throughout the history of mankind God has made different covenants, and one must comprehend this very important subject lest he follow the wrong covenant, which would lead him from the righteousness of God. With this in mind, it is important to note that most of the religious world has little to no idea of the importance of the different covenants in the Bible. This is manifested in their teaching and actions concerning the Law of Moses.

God has given man His Book to use it correctly. No one has the liberty to select different teachings and apply them according to human standards that God has not authorized. It is written throughout the Bible that man is prohibited from tampering with God's Word.

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deu. 4:2).

Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar (Pro. 30:6).

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

It is the height of arrogance and stupidity for man to believe that he has the liberty to assault the Scriptures with human wisdom. Man must limit his handling of God's Word to honest investigation and interpretation.

All the error being taught in the religious world cannot be attributed completely to faulty interpretation. One of the most dangerous attitudes man can have toward Divine Writ is selfish ambition. This ungodly characteristic cannot be removed easily and has caused untold harm to honest interpretation of the Scriptures—especially in regards to the study of His covenants. Paul said that man has the responsibility to handle the Scriptures correctly: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Selfish ambition will keep one from “rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Selfish ambition and inaccurate interpretation pale in comparison to misplaced loyalty. Perhaps the abundance of religious error that is being taught today in *Christianity*, and particularly in relations to covenants, owes its existence to following the traditions of men. Misplaced loyalty is unacceptable to the Lord. Jesus said: “*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mat. 15:8-9).

Sound interpretation of the Scripture is essential to understanding the different covenants God has established with man throughout history. Harmony in the church and the unity of all Christians depends on “rightly dividing the word of truth.”

COVENANT DEFINED

“Rightly dividing the word of truth,” involves understand the biblical meaning of words. The words in the Bible are God-breathed.

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

God has given man these precious words so he can know the will of God and live according to Divine testimonies, statutes, regulations, precepts, and commandments. The wise student of the Bible will seek out the correct meaning of the words God uses to teach and guide man.

Covenant is defined as a “cutting,” with reference “to the custom of cutting or dividing animals in two and passing between the parts in initiating a covenant” (Smith). “An agreement between two people or two groups that involves promises on the part of each to the other. The concept of covenant between God and His people is one of the most important theological truths of the Bible” (Nelson). It must be strongly emphasized that when God makes a covenant, He is the One who establishes the terms of that covenant. Man may enter into the agreement, but he does not have the authority to change the terms. Once anyone takes the initiative to change the terms of the covenant God has established, the agreement is voided in the eyes of God.

When God establishes a covenant, He will keep all the terms of the covenant as long as man is obedient to the terms fixed in that pledge. God made a covenant with Noah. Noah was to build an ark by the rules God set. The Lord said: “But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you” (Gen. 6:18). Noah was a man of faith, who trusted the words of God following the directions given by the Lord. The ark was built of a specified material: “gopher wood.” It had rooms and was covered inside and out with pitch. The ark also had a window and door by which Noah, his family, and the animals could enter the floating box. What did Noah do? “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did” (6:22). The writer of Hebrews said that Noah acted out of faith and godly fear:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Heb. 11:7).

Therefore, Noah kept the terms of the covenant and saved his life and the lives of his family. What would have happened if Noah was induced to make a change to the terms of the agreement? The answer is death for Noah and his house.

Entering a covenant with God demands faithfulness to the terms. Anything less than total faithfulness will bring disaster. God will pun-

ish all who reject the terms of the agreement. Because of their unfaithfulness, the Israelites spent seventy years in Babylon. The punishment for Christians who reject the terms of Christ will be much greater. Jesus said: “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:30).

THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH

One of the most faithful of God’s servants was Jeremiah. He became a prophet of God as a youth. God told Jeremiah that he was chosen before he was formed in the womb: “Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations’” (1:4-5). Jeremiah tried to reject the job of being a prophet of God by using the excuse he was too young. He said, “Then said I: ‘Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I *am* a youth’” (1:6). God never accepts excuses, and He refused to accept the one given by Jeremiah (1:8).

During the time Jeremiah served God, the people of Judah were extremely wicked. Jeremiah made an exerted effort for forty years, trumpeting a message from God that the people judged unacceptable; thus it fell on deaf ears. It was a message of doom to a stiff-necked people. “But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction” (17:23). The prophet was disliked intensely and oppressed by the wicked citizenry of Judah. The message of repentance was foul tasting to an ungodly, immoral people. The abominations they committed never brought shame to their hearts:

“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down,” says the LORD (6:15).

Because they would not surrender to the will of God, they had nowhere to escape in the day of disaster. God’s judgment was on the horizon and they were blind and deaf to all the warnings from His faithful prophet.

While Jeremiah’s message was one of doom to a wicked people, he spoke some of the most promising words of great blessings about “a new covenant” that God would establish. It is written:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (31:31-34).

This prophecy speaks of a new covenant that will be established by God. A new covenant implies that the Mosaic Covenant would come to an end. Every trace of it (including the Ten Commandments) will be brought to an end by the new covenant God will institute through His Son, Christ Jesus.

THE PURPOSE OF THE OLD COVENANT

It is extremely difficult for some in the religious world to understand that the Mosaic Covenant was being replaced by a new one. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, the apostle Paul diligently explained why the Mosaic Law was replaced by the new law under Christ. He explains that the Law of Moses had a purpose which was fulfilled in the “Seed”—that is, Christ. It is written:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “*And to your Seed,*” who is Christ. And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect (Gal. 3:16-17).

Paul argues that God’s promise to Abraham was not fulfilled in the Law of Moses but in the Seed promise. It was not the multitude of fleshly descendants of Abraham that God was speaking (*seeds*) but one “Seed” (the Lord Jesus) through whom the promise was accomplished. Therefore, the promise of the “Seed” was not satisfied at Abraham’s death or fulfilled in the Mosaic Law.

In anticipation of questions asked by Jewish Christians, Paul gives the purpose of the Law of Moses. “What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through

angels by the hand of a mediator” (3:19). The Mosaic Law was added for a purpose, but it did not invalidate the covenant God established with Abraham. In Genesis, one can read about the seed covenant the Lord established with Abraham: “And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ ...and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him” (Gen. 17:18, 29). The law was added because of sin. It gives man the knowledge of sin and God’s hatred of it. Through the Mosaic Law, man can learn of the dreaded consequences of breaking God’s rule (the way of life He established for mankind to follow). “Since the law ‘was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made,’ to determine when the Seed came is to learn when the law ended” (Crouch 37).

THE OLD COVENANT WAS A TRAINER

The Mosaic Law served as a “schoolmaster,” or “tutor” to train the Jews about the coming of the Seed of Abraham that was promised with a pledge that preceded the covenant God established with the Jews in Horeb (Deu. 5:1-22). “Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:24-25). When the training period was complete, God sent His only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, so mankind “might be justified.”

Justified is defined as “declare righteous, to recognize as righteous, proved to be in the right and accepted by God” (Rienecker and Rogers 33). Thus, for one to be declared or recognized as righteous before God, he must be following the doctrine of Christ. It is through the obedience to the teaching of Christ that one is saved and not through the keeping of the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant had accomplished what God intended it to do in bringing the Jews to Christ. It was always meant to be a temporary contract. Paul makes it clear to the church at Corinth the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law:

But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.

For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:7-18).

The Old covenant “written and engraved on stones,” the Ten Commandments, is taken away when one turns to the Lord Jesus. To follow the Old covenant today is to reject Jesus and His death on the cross. All who reject Jesus’ teaching are rejected by God. “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Those who adhere to a temporary law have made the death of Christ of no effect in their lives. Therefore, God turns His back on them, and they are without hope.

THE NEW COVENANT

The writer of Hebrews quoted Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 31:31-34) of the New covenant applying it to the Christian Age. He wrote:

For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (8:7-13).

He plainly states the superior nature of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant and that Jesus is the “Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (8:6). The Old Covenant was not “faultless.” This does not mean that it had errors in it, but it was weak because it was not designed to bring man into permanent fellowship with God. As stated above, the old law had accomplished the purpose for which God gave it (Gal. 3:21, 23-28). Therefore, the old must be set aside for the new to accomplish God’s plan of redemption. It is through the blood of Christ that salvation is made possible—not the keeping of the Ten Commandments or the sacrifice of bulls and goats (Heb. 10:4). In the passage above (8:7-13), the inspired writer makes a marked contrast between the Old Covenant (Old Testament) and the New Covenant (New Testament).

When did the covenant God made with Moses and Israel become old? It was not considered *old* while in effect, but when Jesus came (giving His life at Calvary, paving the way for life eternal), the change was made in Heaven and on earth. The covenant made at Sinai became an obsolete religious system. It ended with every nail that attached Jesus to the cross. Paul referred to it as “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14).

THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANT

The character of the New Testament Law of Christ was not written on stones as were the Ten Commandments; instead they were written in the mind and on the heart of man (Heb. 8:10). The Word of God is written on the heart but not by direct revelation. It is written through the preaching and teaching of that which is recorded in the New Testament. Paul declared: “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Under the Law of Moses, the Jew was born into a covenant relationship with God and learned of Him as they grew in age (Heb. 8:11). Under the New Covenant, the Law of Christ, all must learn of God before they can enter into a covenant relationship with Him. This rules out infant membership because their mental ability has not developed to the state of learning about God and Jesus.

Under the Old Covenant, the Jew had a remembrance of sin from year to year. “But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year” (10:3). Under the New Covenant, forgiveness of sins is full and

complete. God will not remember their sins anymore. “*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more*” (8:12). The final and permanent forgiveness of sins is the most wonderful blessing man can receive. This does not mean that one will never sin again. Sin will happen in the Christian’s life, but those sins can be removed by God’s second law of pardon given through Christ.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses 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 (1 John 1:6-9).

Because of the once for all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the forgiveness of sins is final.

Because of the New Covenant, the Old Covenant has become obsolete and vanished away (Heb. 8:13). There were many who chose to cling to the *corpse* of the Old Covenant in seeking to keep the various sacrifices and adhere to its outdated teaching, but God removes the *corpse* of the Old Covenant by destroying the temple and the obsolete worship of the Law of Moses in A.D. 70.

CONCLUSION

The prophecy of Jeremiah points to Christianity’s superiority over the Old Covenant (Old Testament). In Hebrews the inspired writer establishes that Christ is greater than the prophets, angels, Moses, Aaron, and Levitical priesthood. Because He is superior to all of these, His Law is superior to the Law of Moses—the Old Covenant that went before it!

Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Paul stated emphatically that it is the Lord’s blood that saves; nothing else can save one from the penalty of sins: “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

It is very important to note the events that happen on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. The Lord took Peter, John, and James to the top of the mountain and was transfigured before them:

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be

here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Mat. 17:3-5).

Peter spoke too quickly in suggesting that a temple be built for Moses (the great lawgiver), Elijah (one of God’s faithful prophets), and Jesus. God said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” To be acceptable to God one must hear and obey God’s Son.

When one obeys Jesus, he will be in a covenant relationship with God. The only way to obey the Lord is to adhere to the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and commandments of the New Covenant. Therefore, hear ye Him! There is no other way!

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JEHOIAKIM'S PENKNIFE

JEREMIAH 36

Dub Mowery

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INTRODUCTION

My assigned topic is "Jehoiakim's Penknife." A sermon has been based on its context titled "Penknife Religion," which reminds me of my sermon titled "Snake Religion." Some religious groups actually handle snakes during their religious services. They have read in the Scripture that disciples of the Lord in handling snakes would not be harmed if bitten by one of them (Mark 16:18). The apostle Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake on one occasion without being harmed (Acts 28:1-6). However, this applied only to those of the first century who were endowed with miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 13:8-10). While attending Freed-Hardeman College in the mid 1950s, I obtained some pictures of a religious service near Savannah, Tennessee. Some of the people attending those services literally handled poisonous snakes. One picture was of a lady holding a large rattlesnake. This was after it had just bitten her! The next picture showed her swollen body in a coffin.

In Numbers 21 we learn because of the rebellion and ingratitude of the Israelites, the Lord sent poisonous snakes among them. The people pleaded with Moses to intervene on their behalf unto the Lord after many died from venom injected into them by snakes. They wanted the Lord to remove the poisonous snakes. Instead, God instructed Moses to make a brass serpent and place it on a pole. Anyone bitten by a snake could look upon the brass serpent and be healed. The venom could figuratively represent the spiritual poisonous effects of the false doc-

trines and practices of men. My "Snake Sermon" outline is posted on the Pritchett Church of Christ's website at www.pritchettcoc.org.

Oh, yeah, my subject has to do with a penknife, not with snakes. For several years I carried in my pocket a miniature penknife to clean my fingernails. The penknives of ancient times were probably much larger. They were used to sharpen the points of the quills of large feathers or slender reeds as a writing instrument. The writing instrument during the days of Jeremiah was a slender reed, not a feather. While attending grade school in the 1940s, we were taught how to correctly write penmanship with a metal stylus nib. Our stylus was inserted into the end of a wooden penholder.

JEHOIAKIM DEFIES THE LORD BY DESTROYING HIS WORD WITH A PENKNIFE

The scrolls of Jeremiah's era were made from either parchment or vellum. The parchment was made of the skin of a sheep or goat prepared for writing on. Vellum was made from a fine-grained unsplit lambskin, kidskin, or calfskin prepared for writing. It would take a sharp knife to cup it into pieces. Paper of plant fiber called papyrus was not developed until much later.

Jeremiah had been prophesying for twenty-three years when the Word of the Lord came to him to write on a roll of a book. God told him to "write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee" (Jer. 36:2). Jeremiah was not at liberty to write his own thoughts and opinions. He was to record precisely the words of the Lord. The translators of the New International Version readily acknowledge that it is not a word for word translation. They used the Dynamic Equivalence method, which is an attempt to convey the thought expressed at the expense of literal word for word translation. The apostle emphasized that the words he wrote were the very words of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). Question: How can a person express thoughts except by words? Answer: He cannot! The translators of the New International Version are guilty of inserting man-made doctrines into their perverted translation.

The message the Lord spoke unto Jeremiah was to contain all of the words Jeremiah had proclaimed during that period of time against Israel, Judah, and other nations. It was to be proclaimed at the temple unto the nation of Judah. This was during the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign over the southern kingdom of Judah (Jer. 36:1-2).

Jeremiah was restricted from entering the temple by order of the king. He instructed his servant and scribe Baruch to not only write the words of the Lord from his mouth upon the roll of a book, but to read that message to those attending a fast at the temple (36:4-6). Jehoiakim declared a fast the following year to be observed in the house of the Lord. Baruch had opportunity to read the words of the Lord at the temple from the chamber of the prince Gemariah (36:8-10).

After Michaiah, the son of Gemariah, heard those words read by Baruch, he went to the king's house. There he entered into the scribe's chamber where all the princes sat. He related unto them all that Baruch had read in the temple. The princes sent Jehudi to fetch Baruch along with the scroll. After Baruch arrived, he was instructed to read the book unto them. Upon being questioned, he affirmed that he had written precisely what Jeremiah spoke. The princes told Baruch that he and Jeremiah were to hide where no one could find them (36:11-19).

After the princes hid the book in the chamber of Elshama the scribe, they went into the king's court and related all the words of the book unto the king. Jehoiakim was not satisfied, and so he sent Jehudi to fetch the book. Jehudi then read the words of the book unto the king as the princes stood beside the king (36:20-21).

As the king sat in the winter house apartment by the fire, Jehudi read unto him from the scroll. After only three or four pages had been read the king commenced to cut the scroll up and burn it in the fire. He and his servants did not fear what they heard. Yet, three of the princes, Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah attempted to dissuade the king from burning the scroll, but he would not listen unto them. Afterwards Jehoiakim ordered that both Baruch and Jeremiah be arrested and brought unto him. The Scripture reveals that the Lord hid them (36:22-26).

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to write the same words on another scroll. Hear His Words:

Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and

upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words (36:28-32).

From this we learn that Jehoiakim's effort to destroy God's Word was futile. Not only so, but additional words were added by the Lord to the second book. Because of the impenitence of Jehoiakim, he would be killed, and none of his posterity would sit upon the throne of David. His body would be left exposed to all types of weather as a reproach and reminder to others of the consequences for disobeying God.

THROUGH INSPIRATION AND PROVIDENCE GOD'S WORD HAS BEEN PASSED DOWN TO US

We are reminded that the children of Israel received their basic law, the Ten Commandments, on tables of stone. Moses, by inspiration, wrote the first five books of the Bible. Other books of the Old Testament were written by prophets and other inspired men. The books of the Old Testament were continually copied by scribes. It was a slow process and provided a limited number of those books for the general public. Their cost was prohibitive for the average person, but the inspired Word of the Old Testament was read every Sabbath in local synagogues. This was a primary means of making it available to the multitudes of Israelites. Another way in which God's Word was to be continually before the Israelites is stated in the following words:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deu. 6:6-9).

In the first century, Old Testament Scripture was read in the synagogues of the Jews. In Acts 15:21, the Scripture states: "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." It was also the custom of Jesus to read passages of Scripture from the Old Testament. We learn at Luke 4:16-21:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the

prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.** And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

In the beginning of the Christian dispensation the apostles and prophets of the new covenant spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter spoke convincingly of the resurrected Christ being the Son of God. He pointed out that what was taking place on that day was the fulfilling of Joel's prophecy concerning the last days (Joel 2:28-32). The immediate result of his powerful presentation was as follows:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. 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? 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. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls (Acts 2:36-41).

Inspired letters were written to local churches of Christ during the first century. These letters were to be read in the assemblies of the saints. Not only that, but congregations were to share those inspired letters with one another. Listen to Paul as he writes the Colossians: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea" (4:6).

Copies of those epistles and books of the New Testament were passed down from generation to generation. In the 15th century a German by the name of Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with replaceable wooden letters. The wooden letters were soon replaced by metal letters. The process of printing was by using a roller to cover

the raised surface of moveable hand-set block letters held in a wooden form. The form was then pressed against a sheet of paper. It was by this process that Gutenberg produced the first printed book. That book was referred to as the *Gutenberg Bible*. Bibles could then more easily and rapidly be produced. In this way the number of Bibles with a lower price enabled more people to own them. Today, many households have several copies of the Bible.

It is significant to note the warnings throughout the Bible against tampering with God's Holy Word. Moses wrote, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deu. 4:2). In the middle of the Bible is this warning: "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Pro. 30:6). Then in the last chapter of the Bible are these words:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

The Son of God declared: "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).

THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY OR DISCREDIT THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

Even in the first century church there were those who perverted the Gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul gave warning to the churches of Christ in the province of Galatia:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

There were a number of warnings of those who would depart from the faith. In 1 Timothy 4:1-3, the apostle Paul declares:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared

with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

The apostle John even speaks of a man in the church by the name of Diotrefes who refused to receive him as an apostle in the congregation in which Diotrefes dominated (3 John 9-11).

Just as in the first century, men through the centuries have had the tendency to ignore or reject the inspired Word of God. The Roman Catholic Church did not want the Bible translated into the common languages spoken by people. In spite of that, John Wycliffe, a scholar and theologian, completed the first hand-written English language Bible manuscripts in the 1380s. A man by the name of John Hus promoted Wycliffe's belief that the Bible should be translated into the languages of everyone. Because of this view he was burned at the stake in 1415. Wycliffe's manuscript Bibles were used as kindling for the fire. I see no difference in this horrible act (except an innocent life was taken) and Jehoiakim's effort to destroy God's inspired Word.

It is impossible for man to utterly destroy the inspired Word of the Lord. Jesus declared: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mat. 24:35). Also, the apostle Peter stated emphatically:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. **For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.** And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

We have already noted that the entire human race will be judged by Christ's inspired Word on the Day of Judgment.

In referring to the inspired Word of God, the apostle Paul stressed that we are "not to think *of men* above that which is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). We should follow the example of the noble Bereans and compare what anyone teaches religiously with the inspired Word of God (Acts 17:10-11). After all:

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).

DIGRESSION WITHIN THE RESTORATION HAS BEEN SPEARHEADED BY LIBERAL PROFESSORS IN BROTHERHOOD COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Many of the original colleges established by faithful brethren were seized by those who introduced the innovations of instrumental music and the missionary society into the church. Liberals, over the objection of J. W. McGarvey, introduced the Modernist philosophy of "higher criticism" into the College of the Bible in Kentucky during the later period of the 19th century. It basically denied the inspiration of the Bible. Robert C. Cave, a preacher in St. Louis, denied the virgin birth of Christ and the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave (Choate).

With such a negative attitude toward the inspiration of the Scripture, the evolutionary philosophy of Charles Darwin became more readily accepted among some schools within the restoration. Actually, any of those schools in which evolution is taught have digressed from the effort to restore and maintain New Testament Christianity. During the last century at least two schools within the brotherhood have had evolution taught in their Biology Department. Those two schools are Abilene Christian University and Rochester College (formerly Michigan Christian College). Concerning Abilene Christian University, that fact has been well documented in the past. More recently a Gospel preacher visited the campus of Rochester College. A lady professor by the name of Carol Van Hooser, who is not even a member of the church, acknowledged that she taught evolution at the school. She also said that it did not really matter if a student in her class believed that God created the universe in six literal days or if He took eons of time to create it. She asked the question: "What would be the big deal?" (Dawson 34).

Sadly, there are many erring brethren who have the same attitude as Jehoiakim. Figuratively, they use their penknife to cut away passages of Scripture on such things pertaining to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage; they also promote such false teaching and practices as the Reevaluation/Reaffirmation of elders.

CONCLUSION

It is bad enough to see atheists, infidels, modernists, evolutionists, and false religions to use their penknife in attempting to cut away God's inspired Word. Now, some of our own brethren are going down the road to eternal damnation by attempting to use their penknives to

cut away passages of Scripture—Scripture they have no intention of obeying.

In 1948, at the age of thirteen, I was baptized into the First Baptist Church in my home town of Idabel, Oklahoma. It was in February of 1955 that brother Roy M. Henderson baptized me for the remission of sins. The Scripture assures me that the Lord added me to His church (Acts 2:41, 47).

After having been scripturally baptized, I visited with one of my former “Sunday School” teachers of the Baptist Church. I asked him, “What do you think about the church of Christ?” He responded: “Well, I think that they’re a little narrow-minded.” In our discussion I referred to such passages as Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. I said: “If I can show you in the scripture where Jesus said, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; would you accept it?’” Well, he could not wait to take me to the annex of the First Baptist Church to look up Mark 16:16. Upon doing so, he looked at the passage for a minute or two, closed the Bible and said: “I think that I can find some scripture to cross that out.” He walked out leaving me standing there. That was more than fifty years ago, and to this day neither he nor anyone else has been able to cross that passage out of the Bible. His penknife could not do away with Mark 16:16.

Brethren, let us continue to contend for the faith which was once and for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

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THE MAN: EZEKIEL

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INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel was a priest of God, a prophet of God, and a prisoner during the period of the Babylonian Captivity. "The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him" (Eze. 1:3). As we study the man Ezekiel, we will study (1) The Man Ezekiel: The Period; (2) The Man Ezekiel: The Priest; (3) The Man Ezekiel: The Prisoner; (4) The Man Ezekiel: The Prophet.

THE MAN EZEKIEL: THE PERIOD

There are fifteen natural periods of Bible history. Each of these natural periods of Bible history begins and ends with a Bible event. The entire Bible is built around this skeleton outline and a knowledge of this skeleton outline will aid us greatly in studying and knowing the Scriptures. They are as follows:

1. The Period **Before the Flood**: The period before the flood is also known as the "antediluvian" (from *ante* meaning "before or prior to" and *diluvian* meaning "of or pertaining to the deluge or flood") period. This period begins with the creation and ends with the flood.

2. The Period **After the Flood**: This period is also known as the "postdiluvian" (from *post* meaning "after or later than" and *diluvian* meaning "of or pertaining to the deluge or flood") period. It begins with

the flood and ends with the call of Abram (his name had not yet been changed to Abraham).

3. The Period of the **Patriarchs**: This Bible period begins with the call of Abram and ends with the descent into Egypt.

4. The Period of the **Egyptian Bondage**: This Bible period begins with the descent into Egypt and ends with the exodus from Egypt.

5. The Period of the **Wilderness Wandering**: This Bible period begins with the crossing of the Red Sea and ends with the crossing of the Jordan River at the end of the forty years of wilderness wandering.

6. The Period of the **Conquest of Canaan**: This Bible period begins with the crossing of the Jordan River as Israel enters into Canaan and ends with the appointment of the first judge.

7. The Period of the **Judges**: This Bible period begins with the appointment of the first judge and ends with the appointment of the first king.

8. The Period of the **United Kingdom**: This Bible period begins with the appointment of the first king (Saul) and ends with the division of the kingdom. Saul, David, and Solomon ruled over a united kingdom for forty years each or for a period of one hundred twenty years.

9. The Period of the **Divided Kingdom**: This Bible period begins with the division of the kingdom and ends with the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C. After the death of Solomon, the united kingdom divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was known as Israel, and the southern kingdom was known as Judah.

10. The Period of the Kingdom of **Judah Alone**: This Bible period begins with the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C. and ends with the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C.

11. The Period of the **Babylonian Captivity**: This Bible period begins with the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C. and ends with the decree of Cyrus issued in 536 B.C.

12. The Period of the **Restoration**: This Bible period begins with the decree of Cyrus, issued in 536 B.C. and ends with the work of Nehemiah. The work of Nehemiah is at the end of Old Testament history.

13. The Period **Between the Testaments**: This period of Bible history is also known as the “inter-testamental” period. It begins with the end of Old Testament history and ends with the beginning of the New Testament.

14. The Period of the **Christ**: This Bible Period begins with the coming and work of John the Baptist and of Jesus and ends with the beginning of the church in Acts 2.

15. The Period of the **Church**: This Bible period begins with the establishment of the church in Acts 2 and ends with the close of the New Testament.

The life and times of Ezekiel are set in the latter part of the Bible period of Judah alone (period 10) and the beginning part of the Bible period of Babylonian Captivity (period 11). Samuel J. Schultz gives the following chronology for Ezekiel:

- 621—birth of Ezekiel
reforms of Josiah—ministry of Jeremiah
- 612—fall of Nineveh
- 609—death of Josiah
Jehoahaz rules three months—Jehoiakim made king
- 605—battle of Carchemish
hostages taken from Jerusalem to Babylon
- 601—Babylonian-Egyptian battle at borders of Egypt
- 598—Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon
- 597—Jehoiachin and some 10,000 people including Ezekiel taken captive
- 594—embassy sent by Zedekiah to Babylon—Jer. 29:3
Zedekiah appears in Babylon—Jer. 51:59
- 593—call of Ezekiel—1:1-2 and 3:16
- 592—tablet giving rations for Jehoiachin
elders confer with Ezekiel—8:1-11:25
- 591—elders confer with Ezekiel—20:1
- 588—siege of Jerusalem begins in January
message by Ezekiel—24:1
- 587—prophecies by Ezekiel—29:1; 30:20; 31:1
- 586—Babylonians enter Jerusalem—Zedekiah flees—July 19
Temple burned—August 15
prophecy against Tyre—26:1
- 585—fugitive arrives—January 8—Ezek. 33:21
lamentation over Egypt—32:1 and 17
- 573—Ezekiel’s vision—40:1
- 571—Ezekiel’s last dated prophecy—29:17
- 561—Jehoiachin released from prison—March 21, 561 B.C.—II Kings 15:27

(According to Thiele, a Nisan-to-Nisan reckoning is used in Ezekiel while Kings uses a Tishri-to-Tishri reckoning; the former begins in April, the latter in October) (344).

Nisan is the first month of the sacred and seventh of the civil year. Tishri is the seventh month of the sacred and the first of the civil year.

THE MAN EZEKIEL: THE PRIEST

The Assyrian army defeated and deported the inhabitants of Damascus, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, in 722/721 B.C. This ended the Bible period of the Divided Kingdom and began the Bible Period of the Kingdom of Judah Slone. During the one hundred plus years that followed, Judah was able to survive the successful expansion of the Assyrian Empire. She did so by means of treaties, diplomatic maneuvers, resistance, and supernatural intervention even though both wicked and righteous kings occupied the throne of David during this time period.

Nationalistic as well as religious hopes were on the rise during the three decades of the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.). “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years” (2 Chr. 34:1). He was the last righteous king to rule in Judah.

And he did *that which* was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined *neither* to the right hand, nor to the left (34:2).

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).

When Josiah was sixteen years of age (632 B.C.), he began to seek after the God of his father David.

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images (2 Chr. 34:3).

Then, when he was 20 years of age (628 B.C.), he began a series of religious reformations.

In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that *were* on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in

pieces, and made dust *of them*, and strowed *it* upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And *so did he* in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem (34:3-7).

One year later (627 B.C.), God called and commissioned Jeremiah to work with King Josiah and be a prophet to the kingdom of Judah.

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests that *were* in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirtieth year of his reign (Jer. 1:1-2).

Five years after this (622 B.C.), Josiah began the work of restoring the Temple in Jerusalem.

And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *that* the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying, Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which *is* in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully (2 Kin. 22:3-7).

During the work of restoring the Temple the book of the law was found in the Temple. “And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it” (22:8). When it was read to King Josiah, it had an enormous effect.

And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, enquire

of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great *is* the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us (22:9-13).

Huldah, the prophetess, confirmed the words of the book of the law to the King's men.

So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her. And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *As touching* the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard *thee*, saith the LORD. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again (22:14-20).

Then the King read the book of the law to all the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD (23:1-2).

Next, the King and all the people made a covenant before the Lord.

And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all *their* heart and all *their* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant (23:3).

King Josiah then continued his religious reformations and restorations which included the keeping of the Passover. “And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as *it is* written in the book of this covenant” (23:21). This Passover was unsurpassed in the history of both Israel and Judah.

Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *wherein* this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem (23:22-23).

The eighteenth year of the king Josiah (622/621 B.C.) was the year of the birth of Ezekiel—who is identified as “the priest, the son of Buzi” (Eze. 1:3). For the next twelve to thirteen years of his life (622/621-609 B.C.), Ezekiel would have witnessed firsthand the work of Josiah and Jeremiah (who was himself a priest) as they labored to reform and restore the true religion of God in the Kingdom of Judah. For the next twenty-five years of his life (622/621-597 B.C.), Ezekiel, as a priest in training, would have been trained in the book of the law that had been found in the Temple in the year of his birth. He would also have been familiar with Huldah the prophetess, who confirmed the words of the book of the law to King Josiah. His training would have made him intimately familiar with the Temple in Jerusalem, and he would have been properly prepared for the priestly duties associated with the services of that Temple.

THE MAN EZEKIEL: THE PRISONER

When Ezekiel was seven or eight years of age (614 B.C.), the Assyrian city of Ashur fell to the Babylonians. When Ezekiel was nine or ten years of age, Ninevah (the capital city of the Assyrian Empire) fell to the Babylonians (612 B.C.). What was left of the Assyrian government retreated in exile to Haran. Undoubtedly, the little kingdom of Judah was very much relieved of her fears that the armies of the Assyrian Empire would ever again threaten her independence. However, things would drastically change, both politically and religiously, with the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C.

When Ezekiel was eleven or twelve (610 B.C.), the Babylonians besieged Haran and it fell. The next year (609 B.C.), when Ezekiel was twelve or thirteen, the Assyrians were waging a losing battle against the Babylonians at Carchemesh. Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, marched his armies through Palestine to aid the Assyrians against the Babylo-

nians. Ezekiel watched as Josiah, King of Judah, marched his armies to Megiddo in an effort to stop the Egyptians from aiding the Assyrians. “After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him” (2 Chr. 35:20). Pharaoh Necho tried to avoid a battle with King Josiah at Megiddo.

But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? *I come* not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from *meddling with* God, who *is* with me, that he destroy thee not (35:21).

But King Josiah would not heed what Pharaoh Necho said:

Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo (35:22).

This battle at Megiddo ended with the death of King Josiah.

And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in *one of* the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they *are* written in the lamentations (35:23-25).

Ezekiel came to realize that the death of Josiah, in the battle at Megiddo, reversed the religious and the political future for the kingdom of Judah. Josiah had been told by Huldah the prophetess that the execution of the order of God for the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah would be stayed until after his death. Now, that order is going to be executed.

Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there (2 Kin. 23:26-27).

Ezekiel came to recognize that the death of Josiah also brought an end to the religious reformations and restorations in which he had been engaged with the priest and prophet Jeremiah. Ezekiel listened

as Jeremiah continued his plea: “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” (Jer. 6:16). But now, once again, Ezekiel heard the people say, “We will not walk *therein*” (6:16).

Ezekiel may have been present for the coronation of the new king—Jehoahaz. “Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father’s stead in Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 36:1). Religiously, Jehoahaz was unrighteous: “And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done” (2 Kin. 23:32). Politically, Jehoahaz was now the new king of the kingdom that had opposed the Egyptian army at Megiddo, where his father had died.

After the battle at Megiddo, the Egyptians marched north to Carchemesh where they temporarily halted the advance of the Babylonian army against the Assyrians. Pharaoh Necho established his headquarters at a place called Riblah in the land of Hamath. From there he deposed and deported the new king of Judah.

Jehoahaz *was* twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold (2 Chr. 36:2-3).

And Pharaohnechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold (2 Kin. 23:33).

Ezekiel may have again been present when the Egyptian monarch set up a new king in Judah. The new king was a brother of Jehoahaz and a son of Josiah.

And Pharaohnechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim (23:34).

And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim (2 Chr. 36:4).

Ezekiel lived through the reign of Jehoiakim who ruled as an evil king over Judah for the next eleven years.

Jehoiakim *was* twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem (2 Kin. 23:36).

Jehoiakim *was* twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD his God (2 Chr. 36:5).

Ezekiel would have watched as Pharaoh then took Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum, into Egyptian captivity where he died as prophesied by Jeremiah.

And Pharaohnechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there (2 Kin. 23:34).

Ezekiel may have heard Jeremiah utter this prophecy:

For thus saith the LORD touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: But he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more (Jer. 22:11-12).

Ezekiel, now twelve or thirteen years of age (609 B.C.), may have been present to also see and hear Jeremiah deliver a prophetic discourse to the new king and to the people of Judah in the court of the house of the Lord, telling them that the Temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed as the tabernacle at Shiloh had once been destroyed.

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings. And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending *them*, but ye have not hearkened; Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth. So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD (26:1-7).

Ezekiel, if present when Jeremiah finished his Temple sermon, would have observed the priests, the prophets, and all the people wanting to put Jeremiah to death.

Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD (26:8-9).

Ezekiel would have known that one other prophet had been put to death by Jehoiakim for delivering the same message that Jeremiah delivered.

And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjathjearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, *namely*, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and *certain* men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people (26:20-23).

Ezekiel, if present at this time, would have seen the princes of Judah become involved in hearing the case against Jeremiah.

When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD's house. Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man *is* worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears (26:10-11).

Ezekiel, if present, would have heard Jeremiah testify to these princes of Judah in his own defense.

Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I *am* in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears (26:12-15).

Ezekiel, if present, would have heard the princes of Judah then rendered their verdict concerning Jeremiah:

Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man *is* not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God (26:16).

Ezekiel, if present, would have heard the elders agree:

Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in

the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed *like* a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls (26:17-19).

Ezekiel, if present, would have witnessed Jeremiah escape death.

Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death (26:24).

If Ezekiel was not personally present to see and hear all these happenings, he undoubtedly would have learned of them later.

As Ezekiel advanced into the early part of his teenage years (twelve or thirteen years of age to fifteen or sixteen years of age), Jehoiakim was a tributary to Pharaoh Necho of Egypt (609-606 B.C.).

And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give *it* unto Pharaohnechoh (2 Kin. 23:35).

However, in the year 606/605 B.C., when Ezekiel was anywhere from fifteen to seventeen years of age, the Babylonians decisively defeated the Egyptians at Carchemesh. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian military commander soon to become king, advanced into Palestine and besieged Jerusalem.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his God (Dan. 1:1-2).

Ezekiel would have watched as King Jehoiakim now became tributary to Nebuchadnezzar.

In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years (2 Kin. 24:1).

Ezekiel also would have watched as Nebuchadnezzar took away captives in the first of three deportations to Babylon.

And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring *certain* of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed,

and of the princes; Children in whom *was* no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as *had* ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel *the name* of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego (Dan. 1:3-7).

Ezekiel, who was now sixteen or seventeen years of age (606/605 B.C.), watched as these captives were led away. Surely he was thankful that he was not yet among them. A few years later (601 B.C.), when Ezekiel was twenty or twenty-one years of age, the Babylonians and the Egyptians battled at the borders of Egypt. "And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt" (2 Kin. 24:7).

Finally, in the year 598 B.C., when Ezekiel was twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, Jehoiakim, King of Judah, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Ezekiel witnessed not only the king's rebellion against man but also his continuing rebellion against God. Ezekiel may have heard Jeremiah tell this rebellious king:

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).

Ezekiel may have even heard Jeremiah pronounce the king's doom:

Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem (22:18-19).

When the king tried to destroy the Word of God written by Jeremiah, the Lord said:

And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, *saying*, Why hast thou written therein, *saying*, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus

saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not (36:29-31).

The Bible records the death of Jehoiakim but does not provide the details of his death.

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead (2 Kin. 24:5-6).

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they *are* written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead (2 Chr. 36:8).

However, Josephus, the Jewish historian, does record the following:

Now a little time afterwards, the king of Babylon made an expedition against Jehoiakim, whom he received [into the city], and this out of fear of the forgoing predictions of this prophet, as supposing that he should suffer nothing that was terrible, because he neither shut the gates nor fought against him, yet when he was come into the city, he did not observe the covenants he had made, but he slew such as were in the flower of their age, and such as were of the greatest dignity, together with their king Jehoiakim, whom he commanded to be thrown before the walls, without any burial (10:6:3).

Ezekiel, now twenty-five years of age, watches as Jehoiachin is made king but only rules for three months.

Jehoiachin *was* eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months (2 Kin. 24:8).

He was also an evil king.

And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done (24:9).

After his three-month reign, he was deposed and deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his of-

ficers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign (24:10-12).

Ezekiel, who was now twenty-five years of age witnessed all these events. He previously witnessed the first deportation of prisoners from Jerusalem to Babylon. Now, instead of being an observer of this second deportation of prisoners, he is an active participant—along with thousands of others. Ezekiel is now taken by Nebuchadnezzar as a prisoner from Jerusalem to Babylon, where he will remain for the rest of his life.

And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, *even* ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, *those* carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, *even* seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all *that were* strong *and* apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon (24:13-16).

THE MAN EZEKIEL: THE PROPHET

Ezekiel and the thousands that were with him were taken to an area in Babylon on the river Chebar where most of them would live out the rest of their lives. Back in Jerusalem, Zedekiah become the king subject to Nebuchadnezzar: “And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah” (24:17). He reigned for the next eleven years in Jerusalem: “Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 36:11).

For the next few years, Ezekiel and the captives would hear false prophets. Some of these false prophets were in Jerusalem and some of them were in Babylon. These false prophets were telling them that the captivity would be short and that they would soon be returned to their beloved city of Jerusalem. One of these false prophets was one Hananiah in Jerusalem.

And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, *and* in the fifth month, *that* Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which *was* of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, say-

ing, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon (Jer. 28:1-4).

Jeremiah condemned Hananiah and foretold his death:

Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month (28:15-17).

Then, Jeremiah wrote a letter to Ezekiel and to the captives in Babylon concerning the false prophets that were among them and told them that the captivity would last for seventy years.

Now these *are* the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell *in them*; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that *be* in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place (29:1-10).

Jeremiah, in his letter to Ezekiel and the people, then foretold the deaths of two false prophets that were there in Babylon:

Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes; And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which *are* in Babylon, saying, The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and *am* a witness, saith the LORD (29:20-23).

A third false prophet in Babylon, Shemaiah, wrote a letter back to Jerusalem charging Jeremiah with madness and challenging the people to put Jeremiah in prison in stocks. Jeremiah responded in another letter to Ezekiel and the people:

Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD (29:30-32).

Five years after being taken to Babylon as a prisoner, Ezekiel, at the age of thirty, was called and commissioned by God as His prophet.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him (Eze. 1:1-3).

The first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel's book deal with events prior to the final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Chapter twenty-four tells of the beginning of the siege in 588 B.C. As Jerusalem was being besieged, Ezekiel's wife died of a stroke, but Ezekiel was told not to mourn nor weep as a sign to the people.

Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not *thy* lips, and eat

not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded. And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these *things are* to us, that thou doest *so*? Then I answered them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword. And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover *your* lips, nor eat the bread of men. And your tires *shall be* upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I *am* the Lord God. Also, thou son of man, *shall it not be* in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters, *That* he that escapeth in that day shall come unto thee, to cause *thee* to hear *it* with *thine* ears? In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD (24:15-27).

Jerusalem and the temple of God were destroyed by the Babylonians in the year 586 B.C. A few months later, a fugitive arrived in Babylon to tell Ezekiel that the city is smitten. “And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, *that* one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten” (33:21). From that point on, the words of Ezekiel were words of comfort and hope for the captives in Babylon as they mourned their loss.

CONCLUSION

The last dated prophecy of Ezekiel occurs in 571/570 B.C. (29:17). How much longer he lived past the age of fifty-one or fifty-two we do not know. One thing the people of the captivity learned through him was that the Lord was God, and they knew that a prophet had been among them.

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WILL THEY KNOW THERE IS A PROPHET? EZEKIEL 2:5

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INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel lived during a turbulent time in the history of Israel. He was commissioned by God to be a prophet and a watchman over His rebellious and disobedient children. His task was to preach to them concerning their sins and their impending doom and to urge them to repent of these sins. His task was not an easy one since the people were set on doing mischief. Ezekiel, however, preached God's Word with courage without wavering.

Today, preachers are to do as Ezekiel and faithfully proclaim the Word of God to a rebellious people. The task is not an easy one since this world is bent on doing evil in the sight of God. Many of God's own children are engaging in worldly activities that take them away from service to God. Preachers today must, as Ezekiel, preach the Word of God with courage without worrying about how the people will receive the message. The people of Ezekiel's day rejected his message and, many people today will reject the message preached to them. The responsibility of the preacher is to proclaim it, and the people must decide whether to accept or reject the preaching of truth. Sadly, many preachers today are not preaching the "whole counsel of God," but, in fact, are preaching to tickle the ears of men to make them feel good about their current lifestyle (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

In this lesson, we will notice the background to the book of Ezekiel and why he was commissioned by God to preach and prophesy. We will also make modern day applications of the preacher's responsibility to faithfully proclaim the Word of God without wavering. Gospel preachers today, who faithfully proclaim the whole truth of God's Word need to study Ezekiel's message and how he never wavered from God's Word.

BACKGROUND TO EZEKIEL

Beginning one hundred years prior to the writing of Ezekiel, two kings in Judah brought her back from idolatry. Hezekiah (ca. 715-687 B.C.), assisted by the prophet Isaiah, succeeded in getting an idolatrous nation back to the true worship of Jehovah God. After the reign of Hezekiah, Josiah came to the throne (640-609 B.C.), and with the help of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum, Josiah once again brought Judah from idolatry (2 Kin. 23:1-25). Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be carried away by Babylon because of unfaithfulness (Jer. 25:4-12). In 609 B.C., after the death of Josiah, Jehoahaz, his son, began to rule at age twenty-three. His reign lasted three short months, and "he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kin. 23:32). Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, was made king and reigned eleven years, but he also "did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD" (23:37).

It was during Jehoiakim's reign that God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish His people for her idolatry. Because of the rebellion by Israel, they were carried away into Babylonian captivity for seventy years. The first carrying away was in 606 B.C. which included Daniel, the prophet. Much of Daniel's work was done in captivity during this time. After Jehoiakim died, his son, Jehoachin became king—but ruled only three months before Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem a second time in 598 B.C. During this invasion, Nebuchadnezzar took the royals, priests, and the working class, leaving only the poorest in the city. It was during this invasion that Ezekiel was carried away into Babylon. Mattaniah was put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, who changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kin. 24). He reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. After eleven years, he also revolted and caused Nebuchadnezzar to once again come against Jerusalem. Zedekiah fortified the city and held out for a year-and-a-half before the walls were compromised. This time, Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed Jerusalem. He burned the city,

destroyed the temple, and carried the remaining people into captivity. This final carrying away was in 586 B.C.

THE MAN, EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was approximately twenty-five years old when he was carried into captivity. He was commissioned by God to be a prophet and priest unto the people at about the age of thirty (Eze. 1:1-2). His prophetic work spanned about twenty-two years (29:17). He was a contemporary of both Jeremiah and Daniel. Jeremiah was allowed to stay in Israel and preach his prophetic message, while Daniel was led captive during the first carrying away.

In captivity, Ezekiel settled in Chaldea by the river Chebar at Tel-abib (1:3). He lived in his own house with his wife until she was taken by a stroke in his fourth year as God's prophet (24:16-18). Very little information is available about the life of Ezekiel. Nothing else is known about him after his twenty-two years of prophesying.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PREACHER TODAY

God's preacher today has a great responsibility to faithfully proclaim the Word. When he finishes his sermon, will the people know there has been a preacher among them? The task is so serious that James writes: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jam. 3:1—NKJV). The preacher must answer for what he preaches, therefore, he better preach the truth without apology. There are many responsibilities of the preacher as relating to not only what is preached, but how he preaches it.

1. The preacher must preach the truth and expose error. There are a number of preachers today who will not preach error, *per se*, but will not expose any error while in the pulpit. This type preacher can go to any denomination and preach truth but not preach what is needed to save men's soul.

The true preacher of God's Word will always, without exception, preach the truth and expose error. Since so much error is being propagated today in the church, there is the need of the hour for men to oppose error publicly. Paul's admonition to Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2) rings true today. Paul explains the reasoning behind preaching the truth: "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” (4:3-4). There are so many today who will not endure sound doctrine and who need to be corrected.

False teachers spread their damnable doctrine throughout the world seemingly unscathed because so many today in the church do not believe in naming those who are perverting the truth. In the first century, the men of God exposed the false teachers of the day. John the Baptizer called the Pharisees and Sadducees: “O generation of vipers” (Mat. 3:7). Jesus told the religious leaders of his day: “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (12:34). Jesus further told them they were “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” “whited sepulchres” and “serpents” (23:23-33).

The Bible teaches that every spirit is to be **tried**: “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). Since there is a problem with false teachers, every preacher (teacher) is to be tested to see if the truth is being preached (taught). Each one is tried according to the Word of God not the opinion of man. Some preachers believe they are above questioning. I heard a preacher in the pulpit at a congregation state: “No one has the right to question me about where I stand or what I do. It is no one’s business and I will not answer any questions.” This preacher, in all of his arrogance, believed he was above being questioned about anything. This preacher has since left the church and gone into denominationalism. Although Jesus had problems with the church at Ephesus, He did commend them because they “tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). Ephesus found the false teachers to be liars, they exposed them as liars, and let others know they were liars. Today, Ephesus would be called a “right-wing” “radical” “brotherhood watchdog” church by many of our *loving* liberal brethren. Sadly, the same thing would be said by some of our brethren who just a few years ago were sound but since have erred in fellowshipping the same kind of men. Today, some are called: “vile,” “liars,” and “toxic” for opposing false teachers in the brotherhood (especially their pet preachers and projects).

The Bible also teaches that false teachers are to be **rebuked** for error: “Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the

faith” (Tit. 1:13). If error is allowed to continue without rebuke, many will be led away into the fires of hell. If, however, a false teacher is rebuked, he may be turned back to the truth and countless souls saved as a result. If he does not turn back, others will know he is a false teacher. Paul writes: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). The teacher of error must be reprovved for his error. Sadly, many will violate Paul’s teaching and fellowship the errorist rather than rebuke him.

The Bible further teaches that false teachers are to be **marked and avoided**.

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).

Instead of marking and avoiding the false teacher, many will invite and praise him for what he is doing. The Bible gives a different perspective in that he is not to be fellowshiped but shunned for his false teaching. Paul uses a similar expression in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15: “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.” *Note* him and *mark* him is a public display of disapproval for the false doctrine he is teaching. How can one be fellowshiped when he does not conform his life and teaching to the Word of God?

The Bible teaches that the false teacher is **not to be received** into our house.

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).

The false teacher is not in fellowship with God because he has transgressed the doctrine of Christ. He is also out of fellowship with the faithful child of God and cannot be supported. If the false teacher comes among the faithful family of God, he is not to be received in the household of God. The one who fellowships him in his error partakes of his evil deeds. There is absolutely no difference in fellowshiping

the one in error and teaching the same damnable doctrine that he teaches. Both will be lost in hell.

When error is exposed, the one preaching the error must be named. It amazes me that for many years members have cried: "Preach against the doctrine, but don't name names." The cry for Freed-Hardeman University is that doctrines can be discussed, but personalities (names) cannot. For the past several years in *good ole* Freed-Hardeman University, the moderator of the open forum will stop anyone who publicly calls the name of a false teacher. I have personally heard the moderator call down men who call names. It is interesting, however, that the ones who asks the question at the microphone must first give his name, but then name-calling must cease. It should go like this: "I am brother (pause); I cannot give you my name since names are not called on this forum, and I direct my question to you brother moderator. I cannot call your name either since names are not to be mentioned here." Anyone with any common sense can see the foolishness of this kind of reasoning. Yet, it happens each year at the Freed-Hardeman University lectures. Someone at Freed-Hardeman University should have informed Paul of the disrespect he caused when he called names. When Peter sinned at Antioch, Paul withstood him to the face and then wrote about it in Galatians for the whole world to see until the end of time. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). He also named Demas, a man who loved this world more than God (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul named Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:18-20), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:15-18), and Alexander the coppersmith (4:14-15). Did Paul commit sin when he named men who were destroying the faith through false teaching? If Paul were preaching today, he could not go to some churches or colleges to preach without being labeled a *trouble-maker* or *radical*. He would be called *hateful* and *mean* because he would name names and rebuke them publicly. John wrote about Diotrephes and said: "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not" (3 John 9). He exposes a self-willing, arrogant man who was dictating to the church his own teaching and doctrine. Today, that is frowned upon by so many brethren. Notice the writing guidelines for *The "New" Gospel Journal*:

Dealing with Error

The careful and sensitive writer can point out the falsity of the doctrines taught by some without causing the less-informed to feel personally insulted. Often this can be best accomplished without mentioning names or even suggesting that anyone in particular has taught error. Simple, careful Bible study on a given subject may do more good for more readers than the untimely naming of those who may be guilty of teaching error concerning it. However, brethren most definitely need to be warned, as occasion demands, of specific persons, congregations, or institutions that are persistently pressing ideas and practices which are contrary to the doctrine of Christ. When such are exerting a wide influence upon the Lord's people, it is our duty to warn them. **THE GOSPEL JOURNAL will not be reluctant to do so.** We cannot mark them with invisible ink and brethren cannot avoid nameless sources of error ("Guidelines").

Everyone will admit that in every instance names do not have to be called to deal with a doctrine. It is, however, interesting that *The "New" Gospel Journal* goes out of the way to emphasize that to keep from offending and insulting some of the sensitive readers, names do not have to be called. It goes on to point out that a simple Bible study may help more than the "untimely" calling of names of those who teach error. Brethren, when is it *untimely* to call the names of false teachers who are popular (i.e., Dave Miller), but teach a false doctrine? It seems contradictory that the paragraph ends with the sentence: "We cannot mark them with invisible ink and brethren cannot avoid nameless sources of error." Should the false teacher be named "untimely," or should that be avoided? The first part of the paragraph encourages writing without naming names; however, the paragraph ends with the need to name the "sources of error." One thing is for sure with *The "New" Gospel Journal*: the reader will not have to worry about reading his/her favorite false teacher's name called on the pages of that magazine. False teachers were named prior to August 2005, since then, names mentioned in a negative way have disappeared from its pages. The next paragraph under the same heading states:

On the other hand, we need to proceed slowly and carefully concerning those who may have merely had a slip of the tongue or a brief lapse in judgment that is not generally characteristic of what they teach or believe. Such are generally eager to correct their momentary mistakes, and we can often best assist them by approaching them privately. Their self-correction helps them and us to preserve their reputations for the future good of the kingdom. If their tongue-slips or judgment-lapses have occurred in public or if they have become matters of public con-

cern, then we will deem it appropriate to publicly call such to their attention when it seems necessary and reasonable to do so (“Guidelines”).

Remember, Dave Miller wrote a book, but Brown Trail practiced the elder reevaluation/reaffirmation doctrine not once, but twice while Miller was there. He must have had two lapses in judgment. Joseph Meador now practices a continuous lapse of judgment in his sins. Why expose these men publicly when they can be talked to privately? The old standby phrase among the Dave Miller defenders is: “Have you talked to Dave about it?” (i.e., privately). Where has the public expositor been in *The “New” Gospel Journal* of anyone who taught false doctrine publicly. Even the *Gospel Advocate* has more backbone than *The “New” Gospel Journal*.

When Ezekiel finished preaching, the people knew there was a prophet among them. He did not back down, nor did he soft-soap the message to keep from offending the delicate listeners in his audience. Commenting on this, Dub McClish (the founding editor of *The “Original” Gospel Journal*) wrote:

Some have been received, but most have been rejected. However, when a man has faithfully declared God’s message, even the most hardened hearts who hear will know that they have had a preacher of God among them.... It is our charge to so speak that truth that when we have finished speaking, whether men reject it or accept it, they may know that they had a gospel preacher among them. Thus did God commission Ezekiel and thus he commissions us (205).

Ezekiel faced the rejection over and over again of the message he preached. It did not stop him from preaching the truth of God’s Word to a hard-hearted and hard-headed people.

2. The preacher must preach the truth regardless of what others do or who is affected by it. There may be times when the preacher stands alone, but he cannot wet his finger, hold it up in the air, and see which way the wind is blowing. Ezekiel did not confer with some of the leading men (or women) to determine what should be preached. God told him:

And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns *be* with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house (Eze. 2:6).

Preachers today need not be afraid of what others may say or even the looks they give. Every preacher, worth his salt, has been given dirty looks, has seen twisted faces in the crowd, and has been jumped on at the back door for preaching one of those *negative* sermons that offended “brother or sister so and so.” The words of Paul ring true: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16). The truth often makes enemies out of those who do not love the truth. This cannot stop the faithful preacher from preaching the truth. Paul admonishes Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). According to Paul’s standards, preaching is two-thirds negative and one-third positive. Paul told Timothy to preach the Word, not some flowery lesson that makes the audience feel good about sins being committed. Jude desired to write about the “common salvation” that was enjoyed in Christ, but he said it was “needful” for him to write the brethren that they should “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). While he would like to have talked about the good news of salvation, he had a pressing need to write about the false teachers of his day. Jude’s sermon would not be well received by many brethren today. Did Jude check to see if the brethren would accept the seemingly *harsh* language used in his short book to describe the filthiness of the false teacher? Absolutely not! Neither should preachers today consult with the brethren before preaching a sermon that is considered by some as *harsh and unloving*.

People are affected each time a sermon is preached. Some are affected for the good in doing what is right while others are affected in a negative way because of evil-doing. The preacher of truth will continue to preach without apology, regardless of how the message is received. It may hurt family members who are caught up in sin. Truth cannot be altered for them. Many preachers will change their beliefs in response to a sin committed by a family member. Many preachers have changed their views on Marriage/Divorce/Remarriage because a family member (especially a child) got in an adulterous marriage. The elders can be affected by the truth if they are not as strong as they need to be. The preacher must continue to preach it regardless of what the elders think. Several years ago I preached at a congregation where an elder did not believe in withdrawal of fellowship. A sermon was preached on the subject regardless of this elder’s belief. He was not happy with the

sermon and so stated it on his way out of the building. This did not stop the sermon from being preached. Many preachers have been fired by ungodly elders for preaching the truth (in the proper way) that they did not like. This did not stop these preachers from doing what they knew was right. Paul stated to the Ephesian elders: “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” (Acts 20:26-27). Paul preached the whole counsel of God to these brethren. Some elders today only want part of the counsel of God but do not want the rest of it.

Truth also affects many of *our* schools when the truth is preached. For years, I have heard the cry of the two Christian schools I attended state that preachers do not need to be “harsh” in their sermons, but preach love and kindness to the brethren. It now appears that the *new* Memphis School Of Preaching is going in that same direction. At one time, the teachers would stand strong against **any** error that came along, and everyone knew it. The Memphis School of Preaching had the reputation for being strong and being called radical by liberals in the brotherhood. That has not been said for the past few years. The school seems to be falling in line with the Freed-Hardeman crowd and issuing statements about the “vile” people who oppose their pet projects and preachers. The shift over the past few years is very obvious to the honest person who will investigate. The Memphis School of Preaching now fellowships preachers and schools that less than three years ago would have been marked (or were marked) for either liberalism or lack of backbone. Regardless of the school, the truth must be preached.

THOSE WHO FAIL TO BE WATCHMEN

There are so many preachers today who fail to watch for the souls of men because they are not preaching the truth. These preachers will preach the truth on **most** subjects but will fail to preach the truth on **all** subjects. These preachers will preach the one church, baptism, and other basic first principle doctrines but fail to warn the flock of the wolves of liberalism destroying the flock. They may preach the truth about baptism, but will fellowship those who do not teach the truth. They say they believe in the “one body,” but they will fellowship those who do not believe the doctrine of the one church. Some (like Memphis School of Preaching, Gospel Broadcasting Network, and others) will say they believe the Bible doctrine of fellowship but will turn a blind eye to

the false doctrine of some of the *popular* preachers in the brotherhood (i.e., Dave Miller, Mac Lyon, etc). When God looks at these preachers, he does not see a true preacher among the people. Many of these men will **never** teach error from the pulpit, but will fellowship error on a regular basis. This has been seen in the brotherhood for several years—especially the past three.

There are also preachers in the brotherhood who will only preach half-truths to appease the sinners. These preachers will only preach enough truth to keep the *older* people happy, but soften up enough to keep from offending the *younger* crowd who does not believe in “pattern theology” anymore. Many of these preachers are also preaching in a way to keep a job. Pulpits across the world are filled with hirelings who are only in it for the money and will preach it in any way to keep the congregation (and especially the elders) happy. Dub McClish wrote:

Not all who call themselves preachers are faithful to the task, however. When some pulpiteers get through, their hearers may know they have had a politician, a psychologist, a social worker, an after-dinner speaker, a moralist, a story-teller, a book-reviewer, a back-slapping promoter or something else, but not a gospel preacher among them! (205).

These are the kinds of preachers the church does not need in the pulpit. Sadly, these preachers are more common than many people realize. Will the people know there has been a preacher among them when he is finished his oration? **No!** Churches, in many places, are swelling (not growing) because people are flocking to hear a watered-down *Gospel* from the pulpit. These pulpiteers better take heed to the words of Paul:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

Many preachers will be accursed at judgment for not preaching the whole counsel of God to the household of God.

CONCLUSION

When Ezekiel finished preaching, the people knew that “there had been a prophet among them.” When God’s preacher today finishes a

sermon, the congregation should know that there has been a preacher among them.

“Preaching is a serious endeavor; there are only so many opportunities to stand before the congregation and proclaim the Word. Each lesson must count! Like Ezekiel, we need to be today’s watchmen so that we may deliver our souls” (Summers 157). Those who are not preaching in a way to stir the souls of man and bring about change in their lives, need to repent, get out of preaching, or both. May God help us to always faithfully proclaim His Word and deviate neither to the left nor to the right. When the sermon is finished may the congregation know that there has been and is a faithful preacher among them.

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THE GLORY OF THE LORD IN CHEBAR EZEKIEL 3:23

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INTRODCTION

When the armies of Babylon flooded the promised land, they came with fury, plucking thousands or more from their homes, murdering countless numbers of Jews, and sowing sorrow and misery for all. The prophet Ezekiel suffered this same fate with his rebellious brethren. These tormented souls marched thousands of miles through unfamiliar lands, driven by their unkind captors to settle by a river named Chebar. Upon the banks of that river, God would first reveal His glory to the prophet and commission him to declare the same glory to his brethren.

Once in Babylon, the people received a fairly equitable treatment. Even though they enjoyed a surprising amount of freedom, they longed for their homes and families that were left behind. Most of all, they missed the former glory they thought was secure since they were God's chosen people in the shadow of the temple (Jer. 7:4ff). Ezekiel had a home (Eze. 8:1), possibly in Tel-Abib (3:15), whose name seemingly indicates prosperity—"hill of barley-ears." The captives were also allowed some political organization amongst themselves, suggesting a tolerable environment (14:1; 20:1). Nevertheless, they were captive and therefore in a hopeless state of daze and confusion.

The prophet's particular circumstances heightened his sense of uselessness and sorrow. Ezekiel, the man hailing from a priestly family (1:3) began his work at the age of thirty, indicating he entered captivity at the young age of twenty-five. Priests typically entered their service at the age of thirty (Num. 4:3). A priest, with no temple in which to

minister, bore the weight of captivity as a heavier burden than the carpenters, bakers, and other craftsmen who would be busied by their own trades. As a young man so far from home, he sat with other captives along the river contemplating his crushed aspirations.

As if all this failed to bring Ezekiel low, he and those with him endured the mocking of their captors.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her cunning*. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy (Psa. 137:1-6).

These volleys of mocking and weeping serve as the proper backdrop for the revelation of God's glory in Chebar slicing through the tapestry of captivity, bringing freedom to all (Luke 4:18).

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF GLORY

God chose Ezekiel for the two-fold task of destroying false hope and instilling true hope in the living God and His righteousness. The undue optimism of Jerusalem tainted the thinking of first and second-wave captives. These Jews must face the fact that their lives and status as a nation were not secure based merely upon being Abraham's seed (Eze. 33:23-26). Neither could they believe that David's throne in Jerusalem with a descendant thereon would guarantee either a short captivity or quick victory.

Ezekiel's vision of what some call God's "war wagon" serves the two-fold purpose of declaring judgment on Judah and Jerusalem for the sins of the people, yet it still reveals the hope in the manifestation of God's glory. The first glimpse fiercely appears as the whirlwind with fire. The brightness of the figure gives the early key to the majesty of God. The approaching torrent revealed its driving force—the creatures. For each of the living creatures was a set of wheels. The mechanics of the wheels remain difficult to imagine existing in reality, but the message is clear: they may go wherever they need to go. These wheels embody swiftness and agility. Eyes cover the wheels showing nothing is hidden from their sight. Upon this *chariot* rested a platform like the sky described as the color of the terrible crystal (1:22). The sapphire throne rode upon this platform with the appearance of a man above it,

full of brightness. The Lord, as a commander, rode upon this platform, framed with the rainbow ushering His glory to judge Jerusalem from any nation He desires. “This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake” (1:28).

THE CHERUBIM OF GLORY

The presence of the cherubim forcefully asserts the message of the book. This is the glory of God manifested in just judgment. These cherubim, though startling, evoked the memories of pious Jews. When David received deliverance, God arrives riding the cherubim in judgment.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness *was* under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him *were* dark waters *and* thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness *that was* before him his thick clouds passed, hail *stones* and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail *stones* and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils (Psa. 18:7-15).

These cherubim constantly held the high position of defenders and vindicators of God’s holiness. In the garden God set the cherubim between transgressors and the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). They accompanied a sword which turned every way to prevent man’s approach to the tree of life. The veil in the tabernacle hosted woven representations of these *creatures* so any who would pass into the holy place must pass through them (Exo. 36:35). Once in the most holy place those who entered by the blood of innocents found the Ark of the Covenant. Within the ark rested the Law, which was the code of holiness for the Jewish nation. Above the ark, the cherubim stood poised to exact judgment upon those who violated that law. Yet, between these two, coupled in a stern relationship of justice, arose the mercy seat where man could find mercy by offering innocent blood. This offering could be the only thing to satisfy the wrath of God exercised through these angelic beings (Rom. 3:25).

In the final days of David, the preparation for the temple included plans for the new fixtures wherein these same cherubim are referred to as the chariots—“gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out *their wings*, and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (1 Chr. 28:18).

THE GLORY OF HOLINESS

One reason for God’s glory is His holiness. It is the holiness of God which cannot tolerate sin. It is the holiness of God which brings His righteous judgment on those who defy Him. This truth makes possible the fullness of His glory in Christ. The fact of His holiness coupled with mercy and love allowed Christ to come to earth and die on the cross for the sins of the world. The Hebrews’ writer conveyed this very message, teaching it is not the angels who hold the glory, but the God-man Jesus Christ:

Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 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? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom (Heb. 1:3-8).

The very next chapter continues to exalt the glory of the Lord above the angels:

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (2:5-10).

This is the reason man can sing of God's glory anywhere and everywhere. Through Jesus, God can remain a just God of judgment and a loving God of mercy triumphing over enemies and exalting those who love Him by the love of His Son (Heb. 9:8; Rom. 3:26). Therefore, after Jesus' ascension and resurrection, He entered into the true *holiest* or heaven itself. In heaven, He offered His own blood as a true sacrifice which brought God's mercy into reality. This was the antitype of the earthly Old Testament tabernacle which later became the temple (Heb. 9:1ff).

THE TEMPLE OF GLORY

Throughout their history many Jews allowed the earthly temple to become a stumbling block (1 Pet. 2:6-8); they could never see the glory of God because of the temple—like many will not see the forest for the trees. After Ezekiel's death and his pen ceased to write, the temple would be rebuilt. However, those who saw the rebuilt temple would weep at the sight of it because of its inferiority in human splendor.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off (Ezra 3:12-13).

Haggai showed Israel the greater glory of the rebuilt temple because God filled the house and it pointed to the Lord incarnate. This corrected the misplaced view of the glory coming from the physical beauty instead of the spiritual.

Who *is* left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? *is it* not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I *am* with you, saith the LORD of hosts: *According to* the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry *land*; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver *is* mine, and the gold *is* mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts (Hag. 2:3-9).

Therefore the incarnation of Christ was the fullness of God's glory on earth and the basis for the restoration of the Jews to the promised land. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, 15-18).

God's glory and holiness took a backseat to the consideration of the temple long before Ezekiel's work among the displaced Jewish mourners. From the prophecies of Isaiah, there was a sense that the temple could not be separated from God's glory—the mistaken readers put the "cart before the horse" in this regard. When reading about Isaiah's vision, they discovered similar creatures declaring God's Holiness. "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). It is implied that this is the vision of God's Temple in Heaven where His glory is in its fullness. Many therefore wrongly concluded that as long as the temple stood, the glory of God was among them, and there was never a need for fear. Looking at the vision of the Lord in the temple, they did not hear the angels singing the Lord's glory over the whole earth. Ironically, God discussed this blindness in this context:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed (6:9-10).

Moreover, there was a long-standing (perhaps undeveloped) idea thriving in the undercurrents of Jewish thought that God was a local God like unto the gods of their pagan neighbors. This notion, called "Henotheism," marks the lack of joy among the willows of Chebar (Psa. 137:4). They thought God was in some way less powerful in a *strange* or foreign land. How deep the misunderstanding went is unknown, but one might suppose that Jonah was trying to "run from God" or get outside of His jurisdiction (Jon. 1). The prevalent failure to understand God's power over all ironically proved the undoing of the Syrians:

And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD *is* God of the hills, but he *is* not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD (1 Kin. 20:28; cf. 20:23).

The idea probably persisted in the New Testament times among the nations and even possibly by the Jews. The woman at the well may have had this misconception of God when she asked in which mountain people were to worship (John 4:20). Her ideas came from the Samaritan Pentateuch, but Christ dealt with her basic problem by answering: “God *is* a Spirit” (John 4:24). Stephen had to remind the Jews: “The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 7:48). Finally, Paul spoke to the idolaters in Athens, and although he was not directly addressing this specific problem, he answered it for all time, saying:

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; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 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; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device (17:24-29).

The message is only made clearer by the book of Daniel, “that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (4:17).

If the nation of Judah had known the glory of the Lord while in Jerusalem, they would have worshipped, served, and praised God in His temple. Instead, they continued to worship idols. Even after the idols were destroyed, Judah continued to have them in their hearts (Eze. 14:1-7). God overcame their idolatry by the destruction of Jerusalem revealing His glory in a strange land both by the river **and** in the plains (3:23-27). In the end, Jesus of Nazareth would sit upon the throne in the temple as the king and priest for all nations (Zec. 6:12).

JUDGEMENTS OF GLORY

The fact that God’s glory and judgment walk hand and hand eludes too many students of the Scriptures. Those who fail to see God’s glory in this thundering judgment cannot see spiritual things (John 3:12). It is precisely His triumph over His enemies and the enemies of His faithful

which demonstrates His majesty over all creation. The Lord Himself taught of His glory revealed in judgment:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory (Mat. 25:31).

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels (Luke 9:26).

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Mat. 16:27).

The vindication of God's holiness brings rewards for the faithful who find occasion to rejoice in all circumstances, knowing this truth of His glory, trusting in His justice and mercy (1 Pet. 4:13).

When the frustration of those weeping by the rivers finally caused them to call upon God, they called for judgment upon the wicked.

Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase *it*, rase *it*, *even* to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy *shall he be*, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy *shall he be*, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones (Psa. 137:7-9).

From reading the prophet's estimation of the people, they had not learned their lesson. In Ezekiel 8, the elders came to Ezekiel. The Lord responded by showing Ezekiel His glory in another vision (8:4). The next step in the continuing revelation more sharply demonstrated God's justice in the destruction of Jerusalem. Step by step, God brought the prophet closer to the holiest place in the temple. After Ezekiel saw the wickedness which should cause all Judah to blush (Jer. 6:15), he finally drew near to the inner court:

And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, *were* about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, *yet* will I not hear them (Eze. 8:16-18).

For their abominations, God would destroy Jerusalem (yet the faithful would find mercy), and the glory would depart from the house of

the Lord (10:18-20; 11:22). Therefore, when the Jews called God to destroy the wicked Gentiles, they also necessarily called on Him to destroy wickedness altogether. In the New Testament the same spirit prevailed in Jews who were unable to see the fullness of glory in Christ:

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? (Rom. 2:1-3; cf. 2 Cor. 3).

When Jerusalem finally falls, the prophet gives God's promise that the wicked will receive their judgments (Eze. 25:12-14; cf. Oba.). This judgment would include Babylon being destroyed (Jer. 25; cf. Dan. 5). These facts should bring no comfort to those of God's nation who were impenitent and failing to recognize the truth of His glory.

The faithful find rest in the judgment of the wicked, but the unfaithful are forever turned away from the presence of glory.

Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 The. 1:6-9).

Once again, the Lord manifests righteousness of glory by judging the wicked. On the steps of the temple prior to its destruction, Jeremiah would declare all these truths to the people, saying: "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches" (Jer. 9:23).

Too many sing of the righteousness they have concocted rather than the Lord's (Rom. 10:3). The same spirit which cannot see the Lord's glory at the punishment of those who spurn His love are the spiritual kin of those who had joy in the shadow of the temple, but they could find none in the light of the Lord's chariot.

Spiritually immature souls enjoy thinking of the glory of angels while being completely blind to the glory of the Lord whom they serve. Yet on the day when they finally see angels, it will be a face of terror. The terror on the angels' faces, nevertheless, will be more gentle than

the face of God and His anger. The last glimpse of glory the impenitent and disobedient will ever see will be Him coming in judgment (2 The. 1:7-9). That sight may be far sweeter compared to the sight of all God's love turning away in withdrawal of the glory of His presence. Overpowered with all of God's glory and fully desiring mercy, they will be too late.

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, *As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God* (Rom. 14:10-11).

THE THRONE OF GLORY

In contrast to modern commentators who extensively focus on the various aspects of the chariot, the wheels, and living creatures, Ezekiel sums up the vision by his reference to the One riding in the chariot—the glory of the Lord. This throne portrays God ruling over all the earth—the earth He created (Psa. 19:1). He presides upon a “firmament” upholding a throne of sapphire; this may compare to the pavement of sapphire stone Moses saw upon the mountain (Exo. 24:10). The Lord's presence never stood exclusively in the temple, but was visibly manifested in the temple (1 Kin. 8:10-11). However, Solomon (who built that temple) recognized God's throne was far above and told the people: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kin. 8:27). David, his father, also recognized this grand truth:

The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD's throne *is* in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this shall be* the portion of their cup. For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright (Psa. 11:4-7).

This same David who had the desire to build God's house was able to look steadfastly to the end. He knew the Lord and His true glory, along with the prophecies concerning the throne and Christ's resurrection, whereby we may approach His throne (Heb. 4:16). He preached Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22), that He was raised from the dead and rules on his throne. Peter declared Christ the fulfillment of David's prophecies—that God raised Him from the dead and sat Him on Da-

vid's throne. There Jesus, the righteous branch (Jer. 23:5-6), was foreseen by the prophets as the One Who would sit upon David's throne (Psa. 89:36-37), and through Him alone would any glory be known (Eph. 3:21).

MISPLACED GLORY

Ezekiel, along with Jeremiah and other prophets, recognized the failure to know God and His true glory. They preached to the people, warning them to turn from looking for glory in the world. Jeremiah wrote:

Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (2:9-13).

The change of glory was not limited to physical idols, as many would believe, but like today many give service to God while trusting in their own glory. Jeremiah would go on to write: "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches" (9:23).

Today, the church unashamedly glories in her own wisdom. Pragmatism presses in taking many forms. Fewer and fewer discussions about the church begin with authority but rather camp out on the consequences or apparent positive effects. Some churches blindly appeal to scholarship—they glory in scholarship. The flip side of the scholarship glory ridicules studiousness altogether. These revel in their ignorance of the Scriptures (Hos. 4:6) while making up for it with the old wives tales steeped in "pragmatism error" (1 Tim. 4:7). Colloquialism alone is their *bible* with God's Word only serving as illustrative material for their *home brewed* doctrine. Either pool of man's thinking provides much to consider; however, the final source of wisdom is God's Word (Jam. 1:25; Eph. 5:17; 3:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:15).

The Gentiles scampered away from God following human wisdom:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their

foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

God has an end in store for those who think they understand what the church needs when it does not correspond to the plan in the New Testament. “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” (1 Cor. 1:19).

Others even lean on their evils to deliver them. They are merry in politicking and outfoxing their brethren at every turn. They set themselves as their own gods answering to no one. Isaiah called their number long before this present era of human wisdom and wickedness saying, “For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I *am*, and none else beside me” (47:10). Whether in the church or out of the church, this attitude of pride wrecks of humanism.

Others glory in might. The trust in might also comes in many forms (Jer. 2:13). When faith in God should sustain Christians in every circumstance, the uncertain trust in the nation’s military strength serves as a substitute for many in our own country. Similarly, in local congregations strength is perceived in numerical growth or the *big names* associated with certain church works.

Even in the lives of individuals, trusting in might takes its idolatrous form in the fad of Narcissus (God of self). God is forsaken as the society diligently presents their offerings to the God of health (1 Tim. 4:8). Whatever one chooses to put their trust in besides God will inevitably lead to failure: “Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18).

Churches constantly steer into apostasy playing the numbers game, while Moses gave Divine wisdom teaching: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do evil*” (Exo. 23:2). So far as numbers go, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had more population than her southern sister Judah—more land, more tribes. God saw that for Judah, smaller was better (1 Kin. 12:24ff). When Judah stood alone, the Assyrian army full of might bolstered itself against Judah. God turned away the greater army when Judah’s King Hezekiah trusted the God of glory (2 Kin. 19:17). Therefore, 185,000 dead corpses littered the battlefield (19:35).

Some glory in the riches of their jobs, some in the richness of the economy, and others in the financial prosperity of the local congregation. More recently the church is flooded with the fund-raising efforts of special inter-congregational missionary works where the cheer leading and adulation for, and over, fund-raising overshadows preaching the Gospel. Simon the sorcerer trusted in money to purchase the gift of God (Acts 8:20), but this was not the work of God.

The trust and glory of riches is the most prevalent form of idolatry in the nation today (Col. 3:5). Jesus admonished man to "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 pitted road of greed leads to destruction over and over again. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this *is* also vanity" (Ecc. 5:10). The prophets showed that riches cannot deliver anyone from judgment:

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land (Zep. 1:18).

MISPLACED GLORY TODAY

Too many members of the church cannot be happy with the simple fact that the church is God's glorious church (Eph. 5:27). Even some *sound* brethren are infected with the poison of Liberalism. Years ago bulletins overflowed with glory heaped upon the church because she was the fastest growing religion in America. While this may sound *good* or beam with good intentions, the wise and perceptive servant should observe that too many gloried in the growth rate rather than the glorying in God. These same individuals would have ridden the Pentecostal, Baptist, or Mormon bandwagon if they had been the fastest growing. Some in fact have forsaken the church altogether, while many of those remaining concoct their own schemes to recreate the former glory of growth-rate rather than knowing the Lord and teaching others (Mat. 28:18-20).

Church growth which seeks purely for numbers is the doorway to the entertainment-driven churches. It is the Dale Carnegie school of preaching who enthroned *gregariousness* as a substitute for the character of the Lord. A limited Gospel subverted the "teaching them to observe all things." Liberalism whittled the Gospel down to as few ele-

ments as they could: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (each with their own shapeless definition). Today, a danger which formerly lurked in the shadows can now stand in the open within the “mainstream Church of Christ.” These are liberals too, but they find this detestable; so they glory in their opposition to instrumental music and women preachers while personally inviting every other error to drink from their broken cisterns.

Jewish nationalism of ancient days caused many misunderstandings about God. Today, some preachers are working diligently to subvert the church’s citizenship in heaven (Phi. 3:20) and the glory of God. They want to replace it with an exaltation and trust of a “Christian nation.” Every child of God should obey the laws of the land (Rom. 13) and pray for the leaders (1 Tim. 2); however, trusting in the nation to save the church is a failure to know God’s glory. The church is presently being begged to support nationalistic campaigns rather than the preaching of the Gospel. They believe that if the nation were ruled better, then the church could find the glory of yesteryear. This is simply not so. When Solomon stated, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34), the righteousness he was speaking of is personal righteousness. Righteous Lot occupied a position in the gates (Gen. 19:1), but there were not ten individuals in the city to spare it from destruction by the angels. Even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job would not have spared Israel (Eze. 14:14). Jerusalem would have been spared by the righteousness of enough individuals (22:30-31). Those who want to change the nation should begin by converting their neighbors with the Gospel. It would not matter a bit if Thomas Jefferson were a Unitarian, Deist, Baptist, Epicurean, or Buddhist; it takes the same Gospel to convert one’s neighbor either way.

There is a deficiency of joy over the fact that God sent His only-begotten or gave the plan of grace so the world may obey and be saved and an abundance of it that nickels are pouring in, numbers are filling up, and noise is flowing out. When these experiences are tried by the trials of faith, these *singers of joy* hang up their harps rather than take opportunity to praise God. They lack the strength given by God because they did not glory in Him (Jer. 9:23).

A seemingly losing situation tries one’s faith to sing as those by the rivers of Babylon. What will be done when nothing *good* can be found about one’s situation. Faith in the Lord of glory is ultimately

the answer. Everywhere there are faithful brethren in *lifeless* churches who weep over the apostasy of the church and struggles in the local congregation. They can sing and do the work of the Lord. Rather than spending time in endless lamentation, they should study to know God. They need to see His triumphs of the past, His triumph over sin through Christ, and by the lens of faith His final triumphs in the end (2 Cor. 5:1-7; cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57).

In the homes of God's children, sorrow abounds where joy and hope should reign. Godly women whose husbands lack love can still sing rather than despair. Consider the teaching of the Bible for her.

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 (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Whether their husbands are converted or not, they have delivered their own soul (Eze. 3:19). Husbands of today, as head of the home, face a daunting task overcoming feminism and truly loving their wives. Men react to these difficult situations with bitterness, abandonment, anger, idleness, and other ungodly ways. They should sing of the Lord's glory in loving the church and giving His life for her. That coupled with a practice of biblical love in the home can bring these wives into a faithful obedience, but whether it does or does not, the Lord is glorified.

Christians working in the world should consider the Lord's glory each day as they prepare for the environment of their jobs. Often they feel locked in a dead end job surrounded by difficult worldly people. Perhaps never vocalized, their hearts ask how can they sing the Lord's song in a strange land. The answer comes hard, but radiant in simplicity—God is glorious and worthy of praise. Faithfully serve that job as unto the Lord (Eph. 6:5). Remember Paul sang in the prisons of Philippi, doing his *job*, and the jailor was converted doing his job (Acts 16:19-40). Whether or not coworkers change or care to ask (1 Pet. 3:15), God is glorified by each individual's righteousness.

GODS GLORY BY THE RIVER CHEBAR

That day by the river, Ezekiel saw what would ruin lesser men—the glory of God (Deu. 5:24). Ezekiel could only respond by sitting in astonishment for seven days (Eze. 3:15). With a charge from the Lord,

the astonishment had to give way to the reality of the task: teaching others the Lord is glorious over all the earth.

Only after months of pleading and the news of Jerusalem's destruction, would the people begin to understand they were in captivity because they did not appreciate God's glory. The truth set them free (John 8:32).

WORK CITED

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

FALSE PROPHETS

EZEKIEL 13

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INTRODUCTION

Not everything is true or of the truth. Some allegations are false. In religious matters, many doctrines are taught but not all of them are true. The sobering reality is that false doctrine can lead a soul to hell. When prophets, in Ezekiel's day, sought to appease the hearts of the unrighteous, they ignored the message from God. False prophets told them what they wanted to hear—not what they needed to hear. They invented their own message rather than delivering God's. By looking at the characteristics of the false prophets addressed in Ezekiel 13, we find a parallel with the false teacher of our day. Watch. Learn. Make application. Be warned.

FALSE PROPHETS ARE SELFISH

The message to Ezekiel gives insight into the hearts and deeds of false prophets. They “prophesy out of their own heart” (Eze. 13:2). Jeremiah records similar descriptions.

Then Jehovah said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name; I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake I unto them: they prophesy unto you a lying vision, and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their own heart (14:14).

Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they teach you vanity; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Jehovah (23:16).

But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their lascivious

doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of. And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Would false teachers today ever promote error for the sake of dollars? In a green-back heartbeat! “Woe unto them! For they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah” (Jude 11). “Forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing” (2 Pet. 2:15).

FALSE PROPHETS ARE NEGLIGENT

They should have been in the gaps and on the walls defending Israel in time of crisis, but these false prophets were not to be found among the stalwart defenders (Eze. 13:5). Do we not see over and over that times of battle expose the real character of individuals? Where are these men in times of spiritual warfare? They hide in the shadows or busy themselves with a myriad of tasks other than that most pressing and urgent.

Far from opposing sinners, who are bringing down the wrath of God upon the place, you prevent their repentance by your flattering promises and false predictions. Ye have neither by prayers, example, nor advice, contributed anything for the preservation of the place, or the salvation of the people’s souls (Clarke).

The false prophets were guilty of sins of commission and omission. They taught things they should not have, and they failed to discharge God’s mandate to defend Israel. Some of the most talented individuals waste their abilities by teaching things they ought not. Time and space would fail us to name them all, but those that have heard Rubel Shelly and Max Lucado or read from their pens (I am not recommending them or their writings!) know that their talents would be great assets to the kingdom if they just held to sound doctrine.

Negligence extends past the false prophets to those who will not oppose them. The late Bill Jackson was known for an uncompromising stand against error. One of his articles bears reprinting.

Lost — While Preaching the Truth!

The apostle Paul described the preaching pleasing unto God as being the “manifestation of the truth” (2 Corinthians 4:2). The charge is that those who proclaim the Word of the Lord “preach the Word!” (2 Timothy 4:2). Jesus’ own statement regarding the Word, in His prayer to the Father, was that “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). So precious is

truth that in the long ago Solomon stated, “Buy the truth, and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23). The sum statement of the Christ, in this area, is that “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The servant of the Lord then believes the truth, loves the truth, lives by the truth, and teaches truth to those in the world around him. When he stands in the classroom, or in the pulpit, his work is to declare God’s truth!

These things being so, and truth being the honored commodity that it is, it is all the more striking to realize that one can teach the truth, and still be lost! Indeed, one can, should such be possible, never utter anything but truth, and the end result can be displeasure in the sight of God, and separation from Him eternally. When those statements are made, one can with some justification ask, “but how can it be? I thought truth saved, and that one preaching truth would be doing the noblest work of God!” It will be well for us all to consider the matter of truth, and how that one really cannot take pleasure in knowing that “I’ve only taught truth. I never have taught error”—if that’s as far as it goes. The study of truth, the responsibilities we have regarding truth, goes farther than that.

Preaching only the Positive

Suppose one would decide, “I will henceforth speak only positive things. I will speak no negative words.” Some have thus decided today, and we fear for their souls. The example of the apostle Paul is that of God’s servant declaring ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD (Acts 20:27)! The Lord commissions no one to take a positive-only message, or a negative-only message; rather, all of the message of God is to be proclaimed to men. Should one decide to speak only the positive, he would have to shun two of the items said to make the Word profitable; yes, two of the items designed by God to furnish a man completely (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

It is obvious that God has placed both the positive and the negative in His will to man. Can any preacher/teacher be any more arrogant and presumptuous than to decide, on his own, that he will cut into the Word and preach only that portion that he desires? He can choose to do so, and following that positive-only course, always preach truth, but still be lost! In the long ago, the Lord instructed Ezekiel concerning the warnings to be given the wicked—there is the negative for you—and pointed out that when one fails to thus warn, in keeping with the words of the Lord, the wicked man will die in his sin, and “his blood will I require at thine hand!” (Ezekiel 3:17-21). Yes, one can preach an all-positive message, an all-truth message, and still be lost because he ignored other portions of God’s Word!

The Failure to Speak Out!

There is another aspect of this that needs our attention. One can always speak the truth in his/her teaching, and still be lost because in critical times when God’s servants need to raise their voices all the more, the servants were silent! Once more, the Lord condemned the silence of

that teacher whose duty it was to give warning! (Ezekiel 3:17-21). Every teacher and preacher faces this matter each time the teaching situation presents itself. There are the ever-present issues facing the saints of God—such issues as alcohol, drugs, the dance, profane speech, immodest dress, etc. Especially concerning our young people, as they begin to establish values many will maintain, for good or ill, throughout all their lives, and what will we do? Will we be silent on these issues or will we boldly condemn all such ungodliness?

Always there are vital issues arising within the kingdom itself. These are issues because some men begin to pursue a line contrary to the Word of God, and due to their teaching and influence, saints are affected in a hurtful way. Such issues spread across the entire brotherhood, and the issue is of concern throughout the world! In recent times we have seen false views on God's marriage laws, false views on the Holy Spirit, false views concerning God's grace, and false views concerning whether God has children in denominational systems. Now, what will the preacher/teacher do? Will he, because of the influence of prominent members, prominent preachers, schools, papers, etc., or because of concern for his own job, his salary, his supporters, etc. now grow silent regarding these issues? Will he be silent, and yet still proclaim, "But I always preach truth?" He should know, and we all should know, that one can always preach truth, and still be lost, because he did not declare all the counsel of God, because he did not give brethren warning, because he did not reprove and rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2), and because he kept back portions of the Word of God that were profitable unto men (Acts 20:20).

You cannot sit idly by while the battle rages. It is not noble to stay above the fray when the fray is over truth and righteousness, yet some do that very thing. One brother, who apparently has lost both his tongue and his courage, said he was not going to comment on the Dave Miller issue (and subsequent fallout) of elder re-evaluation/reaffirmation because he wanted to see how things "shook out" before committing himself.¹ He would have been right at home in Meroz. "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). Neutrality is not an option in the battle for truth and righteousness. You are either for the Lord's way or you are not. There is no middle ground in this battle. Still we are reminded that certain Israelite brethren reached a comfortable location and thought they would sit out the remainder of the conquest and its attendant battles. Moses thought otherwise:

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? (Num. 32:6-7).

False teachers would not be nearly so successful if more brethren would fulfill—not neglect—their duties to reprove error. Because it is relevant, truthful, and well-written, read carefully the article below:

THE CONSEQUENCES OF IGNORING 2 JOHN 9-11

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

This trio of valiant verses reads, “*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.*”

CAN ONE REMAIN FAITHFUL WHILE IGNORING THIS TEACHING?

A gigantic NO and for reasons both cogent and convincing at least to the mind that loves truth and loves it supremely, to the mind that loves righteousness and hates iniquity as our blessed Lord did (See Psalms 45:6; Heb. 1:8,9). Ten reasons will now be numbered and noted.

1) These three verses constitute a portion of God’s word. If one can ignore three verses with impunity, why not three hundred verses, three thousand verses or thirty thousand verses which gets nearly all the 31,102 verses from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21? John did not write these three verses to be ignored. The Holy Spirit did not inspire these three verses to be ignored. God the Father and God the Son, the real originators of all truth, did not direct the Holy Spirit to convey them to John to be ignored when once written.

2) To ignore a potent passage like this shows spineless toleration for error and no real regard for maintaining a sound faith and a faultless practice. Please recall that there is only one acceptable stance for any soldier of Christ toward any error, toward all error—EXPOSURE AND OPPOSITION.

3) To ignore such shows that one is not really concerned with the doctrine Christ taught and/or had others proclaim in his name so faithfully and fervently. To despise the doctrine of Christ is to despise Deity who authored the doctrine or teaching.

4) To ignore such means that one thinks as highly of error and the errorists, who push and promote such, as of truth and the dedicated soldiers of Calvary who preach and practice such. A person of such disposition surely cannot love righteousness and hate iniquity as did our Lord.

5) To ignore such makes impossible our abiding in the doctrine of Christ and this means that we forfeit both God the Father and Christ the Son. We cannot have one without the other and we cannot have either minus the doctrine of Christ.

- 6) To ignore such means that we are giving our stamp of approval to every flagrant falsehood and erroneous error that comes along. It means that we are supportive of those who would destroy the very cause of Christ on earth.
- 7) To ignore such means that we are really more interested in the spread of error than in the spread of saving truth and this defeats the very purpose of our being.
- 8) To ignore such means that our homes would soon become the very citadels of every corruptible error that comes along. The concept of CHRIST IN THE HOME could NOT remain in such surroundings at all. Children would soon be corrupted by such devious influences ever surrounding them.
- 9) To ignore such would place us in the position of influencing all others to ignore this same passage and its weighty warning. We would thus become a millstone around the necks of others pulling them down into the waters of destruction.
- 10) To ignore such is the equivalent of erecting a sure blockade toward our going home to heaven at last. Ignoring Scripture and going home to heaven are incompatibles.

HOW SHOULD THE FAITHFUL REGARD THOSE IGNORING THIS PASSAGE?

The very same way that John would have regarded the elect lady and her children had they responded back with a rousing rejection of this sage, apostolic counsel. John did not write it for the initial readers to reject it, ignore it or defy it. He wrote it to be believed and practiced with dedication and permanence. Had they rejected or ignored it, it would have produced a very serious rupture between John and this Christian family. No longer would John have designated her as “the ELECT lady” (v.1). No longer would he have commended her children because they walked in truth (v.4). No longer would he have referred to this family as ones “*whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth...*” (v.1). John would still have loved them but they would no longer have been fellow-dwellers in the righteous realm of kingly truth. No longer would he have referred to the fact that truth indwelt this lady and her children (v.2). No longer would he have anticipated a fullness of joy in a face-to-face meeting (v.12). No longer could he have conveyed joyful greetings from the children of her elect sister— her faithful nephews and nieces. Rejection of truth always mars such family ties in Christ. It would have broken the heart of the aged apostle had he learned that this esteemed lady and her children treated with contempt and a sneer such precious points as he incorporated into this trio of truthful admonitions, these needed exhortations. John would have surmised promptly that the whole scope of Biblical teachings relative to discipline would have been in serious jeopardy with this lady and her children. This would have been inclusive of instructive discipline and corrective discipline and both of these get nearly the whole of apostolic doctrine. Instructive discipline is very

comprehensive including all New Testament truth designed to keep us in the way that is holy and right.

But even more important than John's disappointment would have been Deity's view of such. Can anyone imagine that the Timeless Trinity would view such rejection with ardency of approval, with pleasure ready to be pronounced? Jesus pleased the Father by honoring his will. This is the only way we can please God now—by heeding and honoring his will and that will is intently inclusive of 2 John 9-11.

Deep suspect should be our attitude toward any person who would tamper with truth as set forth in these three verses of towering truth. What about those who once knew the truth of these passages, believed these passages, faithfully proclaimed them, defended them when they came under attack and lived in harmony therewith but now have rejected them or rewritten them. The reason is very evident why some have turned from these passages or have rewritten them. They want to join hands with denominational groups like the *Independent Christian Church*. They wish to count them as long lost brethren. With others, they want to be invited to their growth seminars and teach them how to grow a thriving denominational church. They wish to be in full fellowship with such. The principles of 2 John 9-11 condemn in forthright language such compromises and so these spiritual weaklings have rewritten or outrightly ignored what John wrote here. Such people have left the truth PERIOD!!! They should be warned. If the marking works no change for the better, they should be avoided as per Romans 16:17-18. Some of our hedging brethren evidently have ignored the Romans passage as well as 2 John 9-11. A rejection or ignoring of these passages cannot be treated with lightness. It is a momentous matter that is solemn and serious. We are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful of darkness as per Ephesians 5:11 and these are definitely of that order when they come with their Christ-denying doctrines of flagrant falsehood and fatal errors. We are straitly forbidden to receive such or convey to such God speed or good speed in the spread of their nefarious notions of wrong and wickedness (Taylor).²

We just wish that brother Taylor would practice what he wrote and quit extending fellowship to men that are holding to false doctrine.

FALSE PROPHETS BRING FALSE HOPE

False prophets said what deluded hearts wanted to hear. They “made men to hope that the word would be confirmed” (Eze. 13:6). Further the prophet records: “Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there is no peace” (16:10). These enemies of truth “see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord Jehovah” (13:16).

There have always been those who prefer error to truth. Error is pretty tasty to some. It is easier to swallow than truth, and it makes for more smiles at family reunions.

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 prophet of Tekoa met with a man who could not bear the truth. Representing a wicked king and an apostate nation, he wanted Amos to go someplace else and preach!

Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thou away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house (Amos 7:10-13).

The weeping prophet Jeremiah had to preach to a fickle people who had false prophets whispering in their ears: "Jeremiah's an alarmist. It's going to be smooth sailing from here on!" Here are some other passages that speak to this very point:

Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the life (Jer. 4:10).

They have healed also the hurt of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace (6:14).

Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place (14:13).

Jeremiah reminded them of their willingness to listen to illegitimate prophecies of those who minimized sin: "Where now are your prophets that prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?" (37:19). As I write this manuscript, a portion of the brotherhood reels from startling revelation that a preacher—a director of a preaching school—has abandoned his wife for a young mistress. The same congregation, and more specifically, the same eldership, was warned months previous to the revelation of his worldly practices and system of belief (including Gestalt). However, prideful men would not hear the warnings. A gullible flock defended

both the preacher and their elders. Where are they now? In shame and doing damage control. “What did we tell you?” “You wouldn’t listen!” Sometimes hard-hearted and hard-headed brethren need to be reminded of their folly, if not for their own restoration, then to save others who may still be reachable. We do not gloat over sin and unrighteousness, nor do we rejoice in unrighteousness. At the same time, we make no apology for reminding them of their foolishness. Perhaps by emphasizing the fact that they enabled this sin, we make others more vigilant.

FALSE PROPHETS WILL LIE

God’s wrath can be seen in his indictment of the false prophets. “Because with lies ye have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive” (Eze. 13:22). These evil men are they that “see false visions, and that divine lies” (13:9).

Then Jehovah said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name; I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake I unto them: they prophesy unto you a lying vision, and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their own heart (Jer. 14:14).

Lies are fundamentally base and dark. Liars are satanic. Mama told you: “Don’t call somebody a liar.” Yet your Mama was not at all thinking of the false prophets of today—the false teachers. God says they are liars. Jesus spoke of the liar’s background when he said:

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).

Our Lord spoke of the liar’s end when through John’s pen he stated:

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 (Rev. 21:8).

When someone departs from truth to preach error, should we be surprised when they depart from truth in other areas such as morals? If a man holds to and teaches a false doctrine, and he will not be corrected, watch out. This person will not hesitate to lie to you. He will tell you things to win your heart—to build a following. Please do not be naive! Paul warned about men like these: “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). Some of these men are smoother than yogurt and well-trained in deceiving others.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by **their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent** (Rom. 16:17-18).

GOD OPPOSES FALSE PROPHETS

In Ezekiel 13:8, the message from God to false prophets is direct: “I am against you.” The Lord is uncompromising toward error and thus, we should be too. God is against the proponents of error. God does not oppose their error while extending His blessings and fellowship toward the propagators of sinful doctrines. Error and false teachers are not even nearly in a gray area—they stand in stark contrast to everything good, righteous, and sound. “What fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). You simply cannot scold those who persist in error while at the same time slapping them on the back and saying, “My, what a fine fellow you are!”

Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them; For ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light (Eph. 5:6-8).

Further, the Bible commands: “and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). Yet we have certain brethren who defensively note: “I don’t agree with brother _____’s doctrine but I’m not going to break fellowship with him over it.” That is all good and fine if the disagreement is over a matter which is not obligatory. For example, there are people who say Revelation was written at an early date; some hold to a later date of authorship. They both cannot be right, at least one party is wrong on this authorship date. However, can you think of any obligations given by heaven that are violated by either side as a result of either position? Of course not. Conversely, if one teaches a doctrine that violates any Divine obligation, then such doctrine cannot be ignored or treated as a matter of expedience or opinion. We refuse to fellowship Max Lucado

because (among other false doctrines) he implicitly teaches that baptism is not essential for salvation. The doctrine violates an obligation given by God. When someone teaches that the Holy Spirit provides aid directly to the child of God in addition to or in conjunction with the Bible, we have rightly objected to the error and refused fellowship to its propagator. When one taught that baptism makes an unscriptural, adulterous *marriage* right, we have refused to fellowship that person. When one teaches that the eldership has no authority in the congregation, we have vigorously opposed the doctrine and its carrier because such undermines the elders and fosters division in congregations. When some men have taught, explicitly or implicitly, that elders in a congregation are to resign if their approval rating falls below 75%, a number of us have objected and refused to fellowship the impenitent promoter(s) of the error. Others have offered defenses like:

- A. He never taught that (even though he was tape-recorded).
- B. He has repented of it (though he has released a statement in which he says he never taught any error).
- C. Were you there? Did you hear him? (though the errorist's own recording is available to all who care to hear for themselves).

Why, some of these defenders would not believe a man was a false teacher if Satan himself were standing there giving him a congratulatory hug!

CONCLUSION

In fact, Jeremiah suffered at the hands of the unrighteous. His message did not agree with that of the false prophets. His message was inconvenient to accept (to say the least). False teachers today, like their counterparts of old—the false prophets—will attempt to discredit or slander those that oppose them. Jesus prepared us for these attacks when He said:

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when *men* shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you (Mat. 5:10-12).

So we will press the battle and never give up. The church marches on withstanding the purveyors of all error. Heaven will surely be worth it all.

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ENDNOTES

¹Dave Miller is a false teacher who helped introduce the "Elder Reaffirmation/Re-evaluation doctrine" in the Brown Trail church some years back. He has never repented of this and other error. For more about the doctrine, you may request a free CD from *Contending For The Faith*, P.O. Box 2357, Spring, TX 77383-2357. The CD covers the Miller errors in detail.

²The article is great but brother Taylor does not practice what he has capably written as he now extends fellowship to those not in fellowship with God. His support of the Dave Miller crowd is a violation of the Scriptures. With no joy we note that brother Taylor ignores the consequences of 2 John 9-11.

GOD'S WATCHMAN

EZEKIEL 33

Bruce Stulting

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INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel was taken captive, with Jehoiachin and others, eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem. These captives were settled at Tel-abib, an unknown place on the Babylonian river Chebar, which emptied into the Euphrates from the east, almost two hundred miles north of Babylon. Ezekiel was the son of Buzi; a Levite (Eze. 1:1-3; 2 Kin. 24:8-16; 2 Chr. 36:9-10). He began to prophesy before the destruction of Jerusalem in the fifth month of the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, and "in the thirtieth year," either of his age or of "the new era of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, who began to reign B.C. 625" (Smith 187).

Ezekiel was taken into captivity with Jews who hearkened unto false prophets (Eze. 13:1-19). As a result, they were still rebellious and idolatrous (2:20:33-39). Jeremiah had exhorted them not to listen to false prophets. Rather, they should seek the peace of the city where they were held as captives, for in the peace of their conquerors would they have peace. He also encouraged them to take wives, rear children, build houses, and till the ground until the seventy years of exile ended (Jer. 29:1-32).

EZEKIEL THE WATCHMAN

Ezekiel's Call

Ezekiel is told that the people would not listen to him because they would not listen to the Lord (3:7). He was sent to God's people who were in Babylonian captivity at a time before the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. He was to speak only the words which Jehovah had given him. Ezekiel was true and faithful to his commission. God addressed him as "son of man" which is often applied to Jesus. However, it is once applied to Daniel (Dan. 8:17), but it is not applied to any other prophet.

Ezekiel had been told to eat the roll which was presented to him (Eze. 3:1.) He had been commanded to open his mouth and "eat that which I give thee" (2:8—ASV). Having received the words of Jehovah, Ezekiel was commanded to speak them faithfully to the people. Regardless of how unpleasant the words may sound or how difficult the task may seem, he had to obey God. Ezekiel's message and method would be in stark contrast to what the people had been accustomed to hearing. False prophets had prophesied to please the people. These prophets had never taught anything unpleasant or unpopular to the people.

Ezekiel's Instructions

Ezekiel was sent as a watchman for his countrymen—God's chosen people. God's command to Ezekiel was simple:

And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou *art* not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, *but* to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee (3:4-6).

Ezekiel's task is to hear the Word of God and teach it faithfully to the people. He is not sent to a strange people or a people having a "hard language" or a language difficult to understand and speak. Rather, he is sent "to the house of Israel" whose language he knew and could speak without difficulty. He is not to mince words but tell it like it is and speak faithfully the Word of Jehovah.

It is strange that another race of people would be more likely to hear Ezekiel's message than the children of Judah. The people had not yet suffered enough at the hands of the enemy to be willing to listen to Jehovah's message. Nor had they been chastened enough in their cap-

tivity sufficiently to cause them to repent. No people will respond favorably to God's Word until they develop a penitent heart. Jehovah told him: "The house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me" (3:7a). The prophets back in the land of Judah had pleaded with the people. Jeremiah had even wept over them, but they refused to listen. The reason assigned is: "For all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hardhearted" (3:7b). Because of their hardness of heart, Jehovah sent Ezekiel to them with a hard message. He tells Ezekiel: "I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads" (3:8). Those to whom Ezekiel was sent were indeed wicked characters.

Ezekiel is not to be discouraged or disappointed at their hard-heartedness. They are not ready to be convicted of sin or to tremble at the punishment which they are to receive. They were stubbornly rejecting God and His messenger. It would take all of the determination and courage that Ezekiel could muster to speak to this stubborn people and condemn their sins. He will need a forehead "as an adamant harder than flint" to accomplish the task before him (3:9a). Ezekiel must not let pity or let anything else keep him from plainly and emphatically speaking the Word of God. He should not fear them; "neither be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house" (3:9b).

Ezekiel must get the Word of God in his own heart. "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears" (3:10). He could not speak with courage and conviction unless he should "hear with thine ears" and "receive in thine heart" the message of Jehovah. When one believes God's Word firmly, the conviction of its truth gives him courage to speak it with boldness.

Ezekiel's Grave Responsibility

According to Ezekiel 33:1-6, Ezekiel's work is compared to the watchman of a city. The watchman must be alert at all times to blow the warning trumpet when the enemy approaches. The citizens of the city who heed the warning will live. Those who reject it will die, yet the watchman (having faithfully carried out his task) would be free from the blood of those who perished. However, if the watchman (for whatever reason) failed to blow the warning trumpet and anyone perished, their blood Jehovah would require "at the watchman's hand."

As important as the task of the city watchman was, Ezekiel's task was greater since he was set to watch over the souls of God's people. Consider the following:

So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul (33:7-9).

As a watchman, Ezekiel had to **watch** God's people and **warn** about them their sin and impending destruction, which was a simple, yet very difficult task. Ezekiel was a good watchman; however, the message he had to bring was not exactly a popular one. As a watchman, he had to deliver God's message of condemnation upon the sinner and His blessing upon the righteous.

To accomplish this task, Ezekiel had to deal with the false prophet who brought a message which the people **wanted** to hear. These were the watchmen spoken of by Isaiah: "His watchmen *are* blind: they are all ignorant, they *are* all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber" (Isa. 56:10). Can you imagine a blind watchman? The enemy comes, and no one sees them! As they enter the gates, no one blows the warning trumpet! Before the citizens realize it, they are being killed, as the voice of the blind watchman on the wall echoes, "All is well."

God says, "I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel" (Eze. 3:17). The watchman's priority must be with God's people. Remember, these are the people that God compared with briars, thorns, and scorpions! (2:6). Yet, Ezekiel must go and say: "Thus saith the Lord!" He does not want them to die in their sin, but wants them to live (33:11). God wants to give His people life; that is the reason He sends His watchman—to protect their life! The message of the watchman is a serious one. It is a matter of life and death!

Ezekiel's Message

Ezekiel 3 and 33 are loaded with threats from God against His people. Ezekiel is told to warn those who are involved in iniquity and command them to turn from that iniquity that they might live. Consequently, if they refused, they would surely die. Some of the prevalent

iniquity in which they were involved was theft, adultery, idolatry, and murder. The warning contained herein is repeated in the New Testament by the apostle Paul. Regarding the fornicator in the Corinthian church, Paul commanded the church to “deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). Hardness in sin and iniquity resulted in God delivering His people to the devil. The purpose is to destroy the flesh that the spirit might be saved. Every prophet, elder, preacher, or teacher worthy of these designations has used Ezekiel 3 and 33 to teach the judgment of God against the sins of His impenitent people.

Also is the fact that God has no pleasure in the death of His impenitent children (Eze. 33:11). Then, in the usual manner of the Spirit, when the threats are the hottest against sin, we find the glorious promise of forgiveness for the penitent child of God (Pro. 28:19-20). This first half closes with the promise of God's care and protection for the penitent sinner in the coming judgment against sin (Eze. 33:16).

The People's Objection and the Lord's Response

The people objected to Ezekiel's warning by saying: “The way of the Lord is not equal” (33:17a). They thought the Lord's judgment against them was unfair. Perhaps their response was something like this: “Look at all the good we have done in the past. The Lord ought to remember that,” or: “How about that person over there? Remember all of the evil he has done? He deserves to die, but now he thinks he is better than everyone else.” Though these statements sound familiar; they cannot excuse sin!

The Lord responds to this foolish charge by pointing out that it is their way which is not equal (33:17b). When man's view and God's view differ, we must “let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). Ezekiel is to tell them that they will receive exactly what they deserve; they will reap just what they have sown (Gal. 6:7). Those who have sown righteousness will reap life, and those who have sown iniquity will reap death. The simple fact is that God will judge every one “after his ways” (Eze. 33:20). This assures us that God will be fair in His judgment. Consider the equity of the following statement:

When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby (33:18-19).

Thus, any sinner who turns from sin will be spared. On the other hand, when any righteous person turns to iniquity, he will lose all the benefits of their past righteousness and be condemned. Jesus said it like this: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). The apostle Paul develops this in Romans 2. To the self-righteous, Paul wrote:

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (2:6-11).

Knowing that God will judge us according to our own actions ought to give comfort and hope to the righteous. However, this same fact ought to strike fear in the heart of every sinner.

The Lord had been warning His people of the coming judgment against Jerusalem and its impending destruction. The people refused to heed this warning because they misunderstood or misapplied the promise that had been given to Abraham (Eze. 33:24). Their misunderstanding/misapplication gave them false assurance that they would not lose the promised land no matter how they lived. Thus, in their minds, the fall of the city would be due to God’s failure to keep his promise to Abraham.

In response to this objection, the Lord points out that the Abrahamic covenant required faithfulness as a condition of their possession of the land (33:25-26). By continuing in sin, they had broken the terms of the covenant upon which their possession of the land was conditioned (cf. Deu. 28-32). Therefore, they had no one to blame for the terrible calamity except their own sinful selves. In a sense, Jehovah is claiming the right as a landlord. When the tenants violate the terms of their tenantry, the landlord has every right to kick them out, and even to call the law against them to force them out. If the lease calls for no wild parties and the tenant has wild parties, the owner has every right to forcibly remove them if he desires. When the Jews violated the condition of occupation, God evicted them from the land. Thus, when the Jews were taken into exile and Jerusalem was destroyed, we understand that Jehovah was simply fulfilling His obligation under the covenant.

ARE THERE MODERN DAY WATCHMEN?

Do we have authority to apply these principles of being watchmen to the work of preaching and teaching the Gospel today? Some might conclude that, since *watchman* applies to Old Testament prophets, it would be inappropriate to use it today since the Law of Moses ended at the cross (Col. 2:14). It is concluded that those who would “contend for the faith” must not be described as watchmen (Jude 3; cf. Eze. 3:17; 33:7-9).

Watchmen in the Old Testament

Watchman did not apply solely to Ezekiel. Jehovah repeatedly sent prophets to Israel to admonish them to obey His commandments. The work of the prophets is often compared to that of watchmen, stationed upon the wall of a city, watching and warning of approaching danger. When Israel failed to heed God’s Word and fell into sin, a “watchman” would be sent to warn them of their doom (cf. Jer. 6:16-19; 7:21-27). When the Northern Kingdom failed to repent, they were carried away by Divine judgment into Assyrian captivity. The Southern Kingdom failed to learn from their neighbors to the North. Hence, they were carried away by Divine judgment into Babylonian captivity. Both of these rebellious nations rejected the warnings of truth spoken to them by God’s watchmen. Following are four examples of God using *watchman* to describe the work of the prophets:

1. Jehovah used the figure of a *watchman* to announce the fall of Babylon and Edom: “For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth” (Isa. 21:6-9; 11-12).

2. Jehovah described the prophets of Israel and Judah as watchmen. He sent them to warn the people of the dangers of their sin: “Also I set watchmen over you, *saying*, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken” (Jer. 6:17).

3. Our current study of Ezekiel serves as a specific example of a prophet placed in the position of a watchman. He was given a message directly from God which he was to speak directly to Israel: “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).

4. Often there were prophets who refused to issue God’s warnings. Of such prophets Jehovah said: “His watchmen *are* blind: they are

all ignorant, they *are* all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber” (Isa. 56:10).

There can be no doubt *watchmen* was often used in reference to Old Testament prophets, but is this term applied exclusively to the prophets of old, or do we have modern day watchmen? Should there be? If so, who are they? How do we react to them and the work they do? These are important questions that deserve a Scriptural answer.

Watchmen on the Walls of Zion

Watchman is also used by Old Testament prophets when speaking of those in the Messiah’s kingdom who would call people to salvation through the Gospel:

1. Isaiah 52:7-8: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.” The context clearly predicts the work of preaching and teaching the Gospel to the lost within the Messiah’s kingdom (His church). Clearly this is a reference to those who would serve as watchmen in the kingdom of the Messiah. Unfortunately, we still have those who rebelliously refuse to heed the warnings of God’s watchmen.

2. Isaiah 62:1, 6: “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp *that* burneth.... I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, *which* shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence.” This is a prophecy regarding “the Jerusalem that now is”—the church of Christ (Gal. 4:25; Heb. 12:22-23). Thus, Jehovah says that He has set watchmen upon the walls of Zion in our day to proclaim salvation and to warn souls of sin.

Christ set watchmen in His church just as the prophets predicted. Thus, we are authorized to apply *watchman* to those who preach and teach the Gospel.

Be Watchful in All Things

Paul wrote: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). The principle of spiritual alertness or watchful-

ness applies in a general way to every Christian. Watching is a common theme in the New Testament:

- ▶ Not knowing the time of the Lord's return, we must be watchful and ever ready (Mat. 24:42-43; 26:41)
- ▶ The servant must be watchful and prepared, not knowing when the master will return (Luke 12:35-40)
- ▶ We must watch and pray to be accounted worthy (Luke 21:34-36)
- ▶ Christians must be watchful and continue in prayer (Col. 4:2)
- ▶ Since the Lord will come as "a thief in the night" the Christian must "not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 The. 5:6)
- ▶ To avoid being devoured by his adversary the devil, the child of God must be sober and vigilant (1 Pet. 5:8)
- ▶ To have perfect work, the church at Sardis was commanded to be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die (Rev. 3:2-3)

Each Christian has a moral responsibility to **watch** for his own soul and the souls of others. Jesus commanded Peter: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak" (Mat. 26:41). Paul commanded the elders of the church at Ephesus: "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Paul said that the brethren at Ephesus should be praying "always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18).

Watchmen in Zion

The foregoing authorizes us to refer to Christians as being *watchmen* in a general way. However, we must consider whether or not any particular *watching* responsibilities have been given to specific brethren. Who are the watchmen in Zion spoken of by God's prophet in Isaiah 52:7-8 and 62:6? Following, we will consider five different classes of *watchmen* that the Lord has set in "Zion."

Apostles and Prophets of Christ Are Watchmen

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, these inspired men were engaged in the God-given work of watching for the souls of men. Through their work of revealing and confirming the Gospel, the apos-

bles instructed the saved in the ways of righteousness and warned the sinner of his doom. It was the apostle Paul who encouraged the early Christians to “therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). The apostles acted as “watchmen upon the walls of Zion” when they fulfilled the great commission by preaching the Gospel. In doing so, they were warning of sin and announcing the way of salvation. Since the teaching of the apostles is recorded in the New Testament, their work as watchmen has not ceased. When the sinner hears and heeds the apostolic teaching, he benefits from their work as watchmen. These watchmen of God continue to function through the God-given Word they preached. “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:28-29; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Evangelists Are Watchmen

Although uninspired, the preacher must remain true to the inspired teachings of the apostles. He must use the inspired message to: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Those who stay true to the message serve Christ and save men by instructing the lost in the words of faith (1 Tim. 4:6, 16). To be a true watchman, today’s preacher must follow Paul’s example as he “kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). By following this worthy example, evangelists participate in watching for the souls of men (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

By designating an evangelist to be a watchman is not a claim of superiority or an effort to control or have preeminence over the brotherhood. Neither does it establish nor endorse a clergy-laity system within the church. Rather, it is descriptive of the process of proclaiming God’s Word so others can hear God’s warnings, obey His Word, and be saved (cf. Isa. 52:7-8; Rom. 10:13-17). To a young preacher named Timothy, Paul wrote: “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). Faithful preachers today will follow this timeless pattern.

Pastors Are Watchmen

The elders or overseers of individual congregations serve as watchmen among the people of God. Christians are commanded: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account" (Heb. 13:17). Elders accomplish their work as "watchmen in Zion" when they obey Paul's command: "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 task of elders is vital to the safety of God's people. When these watchmen fail to sound the warning, souls will be destroyed by sin and error, just as sheep without a shepherd will be devoured by wolves (cf. Acts 20:29-30). We must not minimize the God-given description of *watchmen* when teaching about the elders' work and responsibility (cf. Isa. 62:6).

Teachers Are Watchmen

Anyone who teaches the Word of God is furnishing their students with God's saving Word (Acts 8:4; cf. Mat. 28:20). However, in teaching God's Word, the instructor must make proper application. Thus, when teaching the Gospel, one must communicate God's warnings against sin and its disastrous effects (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26). In doing so, the Gospel teacher will equip their students with a knowledge of God's Word so they may be saved from sin (Rom. 1:15-16; John 8:31-32; 2 Tim. 2:2). Without the saving message of the Gospel, souls will remain lost in sin. By teaching the Gospel, the instructor is truly being a watchman for the souls of others (cf. Acts 18:26).

Every Disciple Is a Watchman

Every Christian can be a watchman. Christians must be aware of the spiritual dangers which exist around them (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 2:11). No one should hold his peace in the presence of spiritual dangers; instead, one should cry out to warn and save the souls of others (Jude 22-23; Gal. 6:1-2; Jam. 5:19-20). Every Christian must be watchful in prayer "with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18). Certainly, we would warn someone who was about to walk off a cliff! How much more should we warn those who are plunging headlong into eternal death? Remember, Jesus exhorts us: "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:37).

CONCLUSION

Did Ezekiel Fail?

Since those to whom Ezekiel gave warning were rebellious and impenitent, some might conclude that he failed in his mission. However, we understand that Ezekiel was a success because he faithfully proclaimed God's Word. He was not dissuaded from his task by hardship, persecution, rejection, or pity. The success or failure of any proclaimer is dependent upon the condition of the heart of the listener (Mat. 13:4-23). A sinner with a good heart will repent when confronted with his sins. However, a sinner with an evil heart will reject the truth and continue in sin. It is the responsibility of the watchman to forcefully warn the sinner of the destruction that awaits and offer them God's plan for salvation.

Today, the watchman must be willing to be hated, despised, persecuted, and rejected in the course of his duties. However, the watchman must never let any of this lead him to compromise the truth of God's Word. Remember, it is the watchman's job to **watch** and **warn**, and the rest is up to the sinner. To fail in this is to be guilty of the blood of those who perish.

Watchmen Are Needed

Today, the "watchmen in Zion" must sound the trumpet of warning against sin and error wherever it is found. This must be done in an effort to turn lost souls away from destruction and lead them to salvation which is in Jesus Christ the Lord (Jude 3-4, 20-23). Watching for the welfare of souls will require the watchman to mark those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine of truth and turn away from them (Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Without fail, the watchman must identify false teaching, expose the false teachers, and those who support them (Rom. 16:18; Col. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). To fail to mark false teaching/teachers allows innocent souls to become corrupt and lost.

Elders, preachers, teachers, and every Christian must watch for and warn against: (1) Worldliness—1 John 2:15-17; (2) Doctrinal Error—Jude 3, 1 Timothy 4:1; (3) Compromise with Error—2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Galatians 2:5, Ephesians 5:3; (4) False Teachers—2 Peter 2:1, Romans 16:17-18, 2 Timothy 3:13; (5) Divisive, Ungodly Men—Titus 3:10-11; (6) Apathy and Spiritual Indifference—Revelation 3:2-3, Romans 13:11-14.

This Word is essential to the successful growth and well-being of the Lord's church. We need men who love God, the truth, and the souls of their fellow man to mount the walls of Zion. Such men will diligently watch and quickly warn against sin. Thank God for the watchmen He has set upon the walls of Zion!

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TURN AND LIVE

EZEKIEL 33:10-16

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INTRODUCTION

While the Bible is the book of good news, revealing the salvation of mankind from his sin, there are certain sections that seemingly provide a “doom and gloom” outlook. Many consider Ezekiel the “doomiest and gloomiest” in its outlook. However, “doom and gloom” simply does not describe the entirety of this book. Ezekiel fascinatingly juxtaposes doom and hope in a unified message to the people of Judah taken into Babylonian captivity. While the first thirty-two chapters of Ezekiel record the severe judgments the Lord pronounced upon Israel, chapters thirty-three and following proclaim the Lord’s announcement of salvation (Keil 278). Perhaps no book in the Old Testament allows one more clearly to “Behold...the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22).

The Israelites in captivity were asking a valid question: “If our transgressions and our sins *be* upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?” (Eze. 33:10). Indeed, if their transgressions remained upon them, they could have no hope. However, the Lord makes clear to the Israelites that they are not forced to remain in this predicament. They could turn—and live.

THE LORD WANTED THE WICKED TO BE SAVED

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live:

turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (33:11).

In previous generations, Judah had conducted themselves in contrast with their wicked brethren to the north. While the northern kingdom of Israel continually followed in the sinful steps of Jeroboam, Judah at least had flashes of righteousness. As the Lord spoke to Ezekiel, the people of the northern kingdom had been taken into Assyrian captivity nearly one hundred forty years earlier. This captivity was punishment for their idolatry, immorality, forbidden alliances, and crimes against their brethren. God had warned Israel, yet they persisted in sin and brought their punishment upon themselves (Amos 4:1-5). Because the northern kingdom persisted in whoredoms, the Lord said:

Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword: and she became famous among women; for they had executed judgment upon her (Eze. 23:9-10).

Judah, Israel's "younger sister" (23:4), should have learned from *big sis*. This was unfortunately not the case: "And when her sister Aholibah saw *this*, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in *her* whoredoms" (23:11). The southern kingdom became worse than her sister: "Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done" (16:51). The people of Judah sinned so egregiously against the Lord as to make the abominations of the northern kingdom seem righteous. So God likewise punished them severely, sending the Babylonians to slay multitudes of them with the sword, and to take survivors captive.

The Lord is not pleased with the wicked. While God is not a respecter of persons, He sides firmly with the righteous against the wicked: "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry *with the wicked* every day" (Psa. 7:11). There is a sense in which God **hates** the wicked: "thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (5:5). God sets Himself against the wicked because of what the wicked do to set themselves against God—by sinning against Him. The Hebrew for *wicked* in Ezekiel 33:11 is *raša*, which refers to one who is guilty of transgression, and deserving of punishment—often death (Brown, Driver, Briggs 957; Holladay 347).

Here it refers specifically to one who is guilty of transgression or sin **against God**—and thus certainly deserving of death (cf. Rom. 6:23).

To understand the seriousness of sin against God, one must recall three facts: (1) God is infinitely perfect and infinitely holy (Deu. 32:4; Psa. 18:30; 92:15; Ecc. 3:14; Isa. 40:28; 1 John 1:5); (2) God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27, 9:6; Jam. 3:9); and (3) Man is responsible and accountable for his actions (Jos. 24:15; Eze. 18:20; 2 Cor. 5:10). When man sins, he violates the very nature of the One in Whose image man was created. Man has then made a decision that severs any fellowship with God (Isa. 59:2; Hab. 1:13). Man must then bear the full responsibility for severing that fellowship, and because of the justice of God, He must hold man accountable for his sin.

Because of a failure to understand the seriousness of sin, some believe that God uses sin as an excuse to unleash His wrath upon man. Sin is certainly a personal affront against God—an attempt to slap the face of the Divine (Gen. 6:5-7; 39:9). But while the Lord is not pleased with the wicked, He also plainly states: “I have no pleasure in the **death** of the wicked” (Eze. 33:11).

Many men would derive considerable pleasure from the death of those who have grievously wronged them. Observe the “don’t get mad, get even” mentality so prevalent in today’s films. Whereas old-time movie heroes would often save the villain from a deadly predicament and subsequently deliver him to the proper authorities, today’s *heroes* forgo mercy in favor of “sweet revenge.” While God’s justice compels Him to punish offenders appropriately, His heart’s desire is that those who have committed offenses against Him do what is necessary to avert punishment.

This is the reason that God warns the wicked—that they might be saved and escape their impending punishment. God had certainly not failed to warn Judah. He sent them prophet after prophet, but Judah disregarded them.

And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand (2 Chr. 36:15-17).

Even after Judah was taken into captivity, God continued to warn them. To warn Judah was the very purpose for which God had appointed Ezekiel (Eze. 3:17). God did not fail to warn; Judah failed to heed the warning. Judah's disorder of disregard persisted until Judaism's final destruction in the first century, as "God with us" yet pleaded with them (Mat. 23:34-37).

The Lord still longs for all to be saved: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Though wicked men still defile His creation, reject His Word, and mock His messengers, His desire that the wicked be saved is unchanged. Although the world He created may hate Him, God's love for the world compelled Him to sacrifice His Son for that world (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-10). He continues to provide wicked men time that as many as possible might obtain salvation: "And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15); that is, His longsuffering allows the **opportunity** for salvation. "The Lord is...not willing that **any** should perish" (3:9).

God's unrequited love for the wicked is beyond the descriptive abilities of mortal tongue. What He said to Judah almost 2600 years ago remains true today: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze. 33:11). The Lord swore this "As I live"—as certainly as God continues to live, as He certainly cannot die, He wants the wicked to be saved.

NO ONE COULD HAVE SAVED HIMSELF BY HIMSELF

Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his *righteousness* in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it (Eze. 33:12-13).

God warned Judah: "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression." *Righteousness* (Hebrew *tsâdqâh*) refers to acts in accordance with a moral standard, particularly in accordance with the standard of God. Calvinistic commentators (e.g., Gill; Jamieson, Fausset, Brown) insist that "the righteousness of the righteous" cannot refer to truly righteous acts or to truly righteous

people. If these people were ever truly righteous and now stood condemned, this would refute the Calvinistic doctrine of “perseverance of the saints” (“once saved, always saved”). Clarke provocatively inquires:

Can a man who was once holy and pure fall away so as to perish everlastingly? Yes. For God says, “If he turn away from his righteousness;” not his self-righteousness, the gloss of theologians...as to self-righteousness, i.e., a man’s supposing himself to be righteous when he has not the life of God in his soul, it is the delusion of a dark and hardened heart; therefore it is the real righteous principle and righteous practice that God speaks of here.... So then, God himself informs us that a righteous man may not only fall foully, but fall finally. But to such righteous persons the devil will ever preach, “Ye shall not surely die; ye shall be as God” (471).

Although the people of Judah were condemned for their wickedness, some of them **had** lived righteously in the past. A number of them would have lived during the time of King Josiah’s restoration of biblical worship (2 Kin. 22-23). Although many people from Josiah’s time failed to live up to the restoration principles Josiah sought to instill, as made clear by Zephaniah’s prophecy, there were no doubt many who embraced Josiah’s return to the Law and followed the Law themselves. Many of them would have worshipped God acceptably, sought to do good to others, and lived holy lives. But what they had done in the past could not save them.

Neither could what they did in the present save them, if they looked solely within themselves. Upon realizing that they had sinned against God, some may have tried to make up for past sins. This is what the Israelites centuries earlier attempted to do after God had sentenced them to wander in the wilderness forty years for their failure to obey His command to take the Promised Land. After they were told this, they determined that they would atone for their cowardice and disobedience by taking the land on their own. However Moses admonished them: “Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD *is* not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies” (Num. 14:41-42). Their attempt to make up for their failure was **presumption** (14:44; Deu. 1:43), and their presumption only led to further failure. Whenever man presumes to self-atone for his failures against God, he will only further fail (Rom. 10:1-3; cf. Jer. 2:28).

The idea that one could amass enough righteous accomplishments in his life to merit salvation is unbiblical and foolish. Moses was a righteous man who suffered constant grief at the hands of Israel because of his insistence upon trust in and obedience to the Lord. Yet, when he failed to glorify God at Meribah, all the righteousness Moses had amassed could not deliver him from the punishment he brought upon himself (Num. 20).

No one in any dispensation could ever save himself by himself. This is the reason why the Holy Spirit warns: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). All are dependent upon God’s grace—His **unmerited** favor: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Unfortunately, Divine grace is often misunderstood. “Divine grace is easily misunderstood as implying moral irresponsibility” (Allen 147). False doctrines of Divine grace, including irresistible grace and unconditional election, **do** imply moral irresponsibility. If the elect are going to be saved regardless of what they do, there is no accountability for their sins. However, some may hear of Divine grace—God’s unmerited favor toward man—and assume that God will not punish man for his wrongdoing. Sometimes the reverse is true—emphasizing moral responsibility is sometimes misunderstood as denying Divine grace.

As a new generation of preachers from the churches of Christ arises to boldly lead the church into a new world without restraints (cf. Jud. 2:10), they have portrayed faithful preachers of the past as failing to preach grace. Jim Hackney, *preacher* for the Heritage “Church of Christ” in Fort Worth (then known as the Midtown congregation), wrote: “I spent too many years of my Christian life not knowing what **grace** was. The only thing I knew for sure was that ‘we’ didn’t believe in it” (qtd. in McClish 2). Max Lucado likewise insinuates that he was unable to learn about grace, and other essential elements of Christianity, from preachers of the church of Christ:

there’s an Anglican by the name of C. S. Lewis, whose books put muscle in my faith; a Presbyterian (of all people) by the name of Stephen Brown, formerly of Key Biscayne, Florida (somehow I got on his tape mailing list), and he helped me understand the sovereignty of God; another Presbyterian by the name of Frederick Boettner, who writes books somewhere in Vermont, helped me see the passion of Christ; a former Catholic priest named Brennan Manning convinced me that

Jesus is relentlessly tender; a Nazarene by the name of Jim Dobson helped my family skills; a pastor of the Evangelical Free Church named Chuck Swindoll helped my preaching; a Baptist in Miami taught me about grace; a Pentecostal in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, helped me understand prayer.

Some day, when we all get to heaven, I'm going to finally learn the name of some radio preacher who was on the air in 1978...in fifteen minutes, he put the heart and soul of the faith in a little sermon on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And all of a sudden I realized it wasn't what I knew, it was Who [sic] I knew. And I pulled over to the side of the road and rededicated my faith.... [The preacher] may have been a Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, or an angel. Or all four! (qtd. in Summers).

Apparently Mr. Lucado has learned grace so well that he believes those who reject the commandments of God in favor of the traditions of men will be rewarded with heaven! While it is possible to learn something of value from one whose belief system is rife with error (even a blind squirrel finds a nut every once in a while), it is ludicrous to imply that one could not accurately learn fundamental Christian doctrines from those who preach the Truth.

Gospel preachers have emphasized the need for moral responsibility and obedience to God, but they have also emphasized the necessity of God's grace. The inspired writers of the Bible did not see any contradiction between the two emphases, as they also emphasized both sides. The apostle Paul set the need for moral responsibility and obedience to God in the very context of God's grace: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12).

There is a danger in becoming overconfident in one's accomplishments for the Lord. Such overconfidence can lead one to sin, as it apparently did in Ezekiel's day. The New American Standard Bible renders "if he trust to his righteousness, and commit iniquity" (Eze. 33:13) as "and he *so* trusts in his righteousness **that** he a commits iniquity." Those who had been righteous in times past could not trust in the righteousness that they had done. They needed to trust in the grace of God, which grace provides His revelation to mankind.

THE WICKED COULD HAVE REPENTED

Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; *If* the wicked re-

store the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die (33:14-15).

The people of Judah were attempting to place the blame upon God for their situation. Not only did they blame God for their situation, they believed that God was going to make things worse on them—and that there was nothing they could do about their situation. But as the Lord told Ezekiel, “Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, **their** way is not equal” (33:17). The responsibility for the situation in which Israel found itself did not lie with the Lord—the responsibility lay squarely with Israel.

Man can live righteously. The Lord had just spoken of the righteousness in which some people had lived in times past. Contrary to what Calvinistic-tinged denominations may aver, men can live righteously—without being compelled against their will, and without someone else’s righteousness being infused into them. Living righteously is a choice anyone can make.

Some believe they cannot change: “I’ve been this way too long; you can’t teach an old dog new tricks”; “My brothers and sisters are this way, our parents are this way, and their parents before them were this way.” Certainly the paths of sin once trod often addict their travelers, leaving them reluctant to improve their situation. However, wherever there is a good and honest heart, there is hope for a change for the better.

The Israelites in Ezekiel’s day were repulsive sinners. Israel had chosen to mar their history by increasing idolatry, and Israel in Ezekiel’s day was showing no sign of turning away from the abominations of idolatry (cf. 8:9-16; 16:20-34; 23:1-44). They were firmly entrenched in their sin. These sins were the reason they were separated from their land of promise and why they were separated from God Himself (cf. Isa. 59:1-2). Yet, of each of these wicked people God said: “if he turn” (Eze. 33:14-15). The possibility to repent and turn was there for each of them who would evaluate his position honestly. Almost nine hundred years earlier, Moses had prophesied of the captivity into which Israel would be taken because of her idolatry (Deu. 4:25-27). With his prophecy, he also gave a promise:

But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find *him*, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, *even*

in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God *is* a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them (Deu. 4:29-31).

They could each turn and re-enter into the covenant blessings of the Lord.

Despite the revulsion, anger, and disgust their sins brought upon the Lord, He still offered them the opportunity to repent. Their repentance—**not** their punishment—was His ultimate desire, which is the reason He was so longsuffering toward Israel (cf. Psa. 86:15; 2 Pet. 3:9). No sin was too grievous for any of them to repent, yet one had to “**turn from** his sin.” Sin had to be left behind in favor of a new way. Restitution, as much as possible, had to be made. Those who had stolen were not only to “steal no more” (Eph. 4:28)—they were to give back whatever they had stolen to its rightful owner. If any were to claim he had turned from his past ways of sin and yet continue to enjoy what he had stolen as if it were his own, he would not have truly turned.

Anyone today willing to evaluate honestly his spiritual position can repent—make a determination to turn from sin and to God. While repentance is itself a mental determination, it demands more than just a thought and more than just lip service to the Lord. As John the baptizer commanded: “Bring forth therefore fruits [conduct; cf. Mat. 7:16-20] meet for repentance” (3:8). Before their conversion, many of the Corinthians had been sinners to the nth degree. Not any longer—“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Hence, *conversion* means “change.” “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Where there is true repentance, there will be a changed life. A former thief who has repented must restore his stolen goods to their rightful owners. If one is in an unscriptural marriage (Mat. 5:32; 19:9; Rom. 7:3), he must remove himself from that relationship. For a number of years now there has been a great deal of debate in the brotherhood regarding whether a non-Christian who has been unscripturally divorced and remarried can remain in that marriage. The debate has focused on whether the present tense statement that such a one “committeth adultery” (Mat. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18) is **continuous** tense. While the contrasting use of the aorist and present tenses certainly demonstrates it

is continuous (cf. John 5:8), if brethren mutually understood and were willing to conform to the biblical doctrine of **repentance**, there would be no need for such semantic dissection.

The opportunity to repent is available to all, regardless of past sins. Among the sins named as being among the aforementioned pre-conversion Corinthians were fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, verbal abuse, and extortion—but they were no longer to be named among them—“and such **were** some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Those things were all past (cf. Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Pet. 4:2-3).

God continually calls mankind to repentance through His Word and offers ample opportunity to repent. So why would anyone not repent?

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin (Eze. 18:30).

He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth *his* neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Pro. 29:1).

While man cannot save himself by himself, there is a sense in which man **must** “save himself” (Acts 2:40; 1 Tim. 4:16). Since God provides the opportunity for all to repent, the blame and punishment for anyone’s remaining in his sinful practices lies squarely with himself.

ALL FORMER SINS WOULD BE FORGOTTEN

None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live (Eze. 33:16).

As the Israelites hurled their accusation: “The way of the Lord is not equal” (33:17; cf. 18:25), they were essentially accusing God of taking the actions of a dishonest salesman who used an unfair standard of measurement (Taylor 215-16). They were convinced that the Lord had done everything He could to stack the odds against them. God was certainly punishing them for their sins. “But even if we turn from our sins,” they apparently reasoned, “God will hold against us the sins that we have committed in the past.”

Even if God were to do so, it would be difficult to argue that He was unfair, or “not equal,” in His ways. They were, after all, sins that **they** were responsible for—not He. As the aphorism goes: “Do the crime, do the time!” For God to hold them accountable for what they had done would be just. However, God is a forgiving God, and God is the God

of the extra mile. Not only could the Israelites choose a better course of action, they could choose an entirely better state with an entirely clear slate. As Moses prophesied and promised concerning Israel's situation in Ezekiel's day, he said:

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call *them* to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If *any* of thine be driven out unto the outmost *parts* of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day (Deu. 30:1-8).

The way God would nurture, protect, and provide for those who turned from their sins, it would be as though God were addressing entirely different people than those who **committed** those sins. The reason that God would **erase** and **forget** their sins: "I, *even I, am* he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25). This fact does not mean that God's omniscience would be cancelled; it means God would not call those sins to mind again.

It has been said: "To err is human; to forgive, Divine." It has been further said: "It is easier to forgive than to forget." As difficult a time as human beings have with forgiveness, forgetting wrongdoing against oneself is well-nigh unattainable. Yet, God is able to forget sins done against Him and to place them where no one can find them:

In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and *there shall be* none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve (Jer. 50:20).

God's *decisive amnesia* regarding our sins is a characteristic of the new covenant under Jesus Christ. Looking forward to the New Testament, God said: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34; cf. Heb. 8:12). Those Corinthian Christians who had previously lived as the vilest of sinners no longer had their transgressions on record: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Once baptized for the remission of their sins, the Corinthians were washed as clean as if they had never been defiled—sanctified as God's people as though they had never been Satan's, and justified as though they had never committed a misdeed in their lives.

What a wonderful privilege it is to be a Christian! "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*" (Rom. 8:1). No one can condemn those who are in Christ; no one can lay a charge against them (8:33-34). This truth by no means indicates that Christians can go on sinning with impudence without consequence (Rom. 6:1-2; cf. 1 John 1:6; Heb. 10:28-29; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Trust lost among men can be difficult to regain, oftentimes drastically reducing the ways in which one can serve the Lord until that trust is regained (Acts 16:36-41; cf. 13:13). But if a child of God who has stumbled returns to the light, he is again washed by the blood of Christ as clean as a new Christian (1 John 1:7). For children of God: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:9).

Such a choice remained available for the Israelites—a choice between fresh, rejuvenated life and hopeless death. This choice had been laid before them from their establishment as a nation: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deu. 30:19). Yet, to this day, many choose cursing and death rather than blessing and life. Why is this? No one is forced to live with the direst consequences of his sins, if he will merely choose life: "As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psa. 103:12).

THE ISRAELITES SHOULD NOT HAVE DWELT ON FORMER SIN

Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins *be* upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? (Eze. 33:10).

The Israelites had continued in sin until they became numb to the fact that they were doing wrong. As they were now “pining away in their sins,” they were receiving the punishment they had been promised, in addition to the destruction of their homes and to their carrying away into captivity: “And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies’ lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them” (Lev. 26:39). *Pine away* (Hebrew *māqaq*) refers to “putrefying” or “rotting away” (cf. Zec. 14:12) (Holladay 213, Wilson 310). This well portrays what sin left unremitted will do (cf. Isa. 1:4-6). If Israel’s sins remained upon them, they would rot away and die in them. However, Israel failed to notice the “if.” They did not have to rot away and die in their sins because their sins did not have to remain upon them. But all Israel did was dwell upon their sins and view their situation as hopeless.

As wicked as the Israelites had been, there was hope for them. Even as the Lord sets Himself “to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down”; He does so with a view ultimately “to build, and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). The punishment which God had brought upon the Israelites was designed to prompt them to consider that they had sinned against God, to appreciate the severity of their situation, and finally to do what was necessary to rectify the situation. However, when Israel realized their sinful situation it was as if they blamed God. They were so wrapped up in their past transgressions that they failed to realize that absolute forgiveness was within their reach. There remain many yet today who blame God for the consequences of their own mistakes, when they could have avoided those mistakes in the first place, and could yet find atonement, if they would only follow the precepts of the Bible.

Remembering the past can serve a valuable purpose. As one philosopher noted: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The Israelites were to remember their history, and were even to call to mind their former sins once each year (Heb. 10:3; cf. Lev. 16). Unfortunately, Israel developed a long history of **dwelling** incorrectly upon the past—they never ceased reveling in past accom-

plishments and never got over the hump of past failures. Just as the Israelites needed to forget their past accomplishments for the Lord, they needed to forget their past failures. We need to learn this lesson as well. As brother N. B. Hardeman said: “Proper equipment in life demands a good memory, likewise the ability to forget” (qtd. by Gulleddge).

It is important that we recognize the seriousness of sin, and that we identify sin in our own lives. The Corinthian Christians had been contaminated by sin, and yet were apparently oblivious to their predicament (1 Cor. 5:1-2). Paul firmly rebuked them, causing them to realize, grieve over, and address their situation. After they had repented of their sin, Paul wrote:

For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though *it were* but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea, *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter (2 Cor. 7:8-11).

The Corinthians’ godly sorrow ultimately led to their salvation. Likewise, it was good that the Israelites in captivity had come to the realization that all the tribulation that had befallen them was the result of their own sin.

Awareness of, and sorrow over, one’s own sin is crucial—but obsession over it can be deadly. The man in Corinth who had been directly guilty of the sin that contaminated the Corinthian church continued to obsess over it—after he had repented and received forgiveness of the Lord. Thus Paul wrote:

Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment [withdrawal of fellowship], which *was inflicted* of many. So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow (2 Cor. 2:6-7).

There is a danger in being swallowed up with overmuch sorrow when one dwells upon sin. This is why Satan is so successful in using this as one of his *devices* (2:11). One can unnecessarily let past sins fester like a sore to the extent that he himself rots away in them. Once the Lord has forgiven a sin, there is no more need to dwell upon it. Often-

times people who dwell on their former sins are far more susceptible to temptation. It is easier to fall prey to temptation to commit a sin again if one does not believe he has been forgiven of it or if he believes that he cannot help but repeat his transgression. Others glory in past sin, even though they have been forgiven, and it is as if they are committing that sin all over again.

Many despair of deliverance because they believe they have committed sins so awful that there is no way they could be forgiven. This writer recalls visiting with a man who had served as a Marine in Lebanon. This man was convinced that the atrocities he participated in while there left him unforgivable. This writer drew this man's attention to Saul of Tarsus, a man who actively sought and participated in the murders of Christians **because** they were Christians (Acts 26:9-11). Yet he became the greatest servant of God after Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:11). This writer mentioned God's plea with the sinful Israelites to "turn and live" as recorded in Ezekiel 33:10-16. The ex-Marine was baptized for the remission of **all** his sins shortly thereafter.

There is no need to remain mired in the muck of sin, when any who is willing can press onward to heaven. Before Paul could do his "one thing," which was to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," he first had to "[forget] those things which are behind" (Phi. 3:13-14). Whether it be fleshly accolades or shameful sins, what is past is often best left in the past. If God is willing to forget our former sins, we should be as well.

CONCLUSION

The Lord made a plea to the wicked of Judah to change their ways that they might be saved. Their past righteousness would not save them if they did not continue in it. However, their past wickedness would not condemn them if they did not continue in it—their former sins could be forgiven and forgotten. The people of Judah were left without any excuse, and those who remain wicked and lost today are left without any excuse. Whenever one holds a *doom and gloom* outlook with regard to his salvation, the responsibility for that outlook and for the predicament underlying that outlook lies squarely with oneself—not with God. Indeed, if our transgressions remain upon us, we will die. However, God earnestly desires that we turn from whatever sins we may be carrying with us. When we do turn, we will not have to carry those sins anymore. When we turn, we will live.

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THE MAN: DANIEL

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INTRODUCTION

Most everybody has fond childhood memories related to the account of Daniel in the lion's den. Well do I remember hearing that stirring account as told to me by my mother. I am able to remember Bible class teachers who caused my imagination to soar as we studied Daniel 6. I can recall hearing brother Perry Cotham as he challenged a large gathering of us teenagers to "Dare To Be A Daniel." Most of you reading these lines will have some similar precious memories.

Daniel in the Hebrew tongue means "God is my Judge." Daniel was only a youth when carried away into Babylonian captivity. Many Bible scholars have estimated his age at the time to have been around 14 to 16 years. Yet, the Scripture informs us that Daniel was a man "greatly beloved." In the Authorized Version, Gabriel speaks to Daniel saying, "I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision" (Dan. 9:23). In a vision, a heavenly being speaks to Daniel: "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling" (10:11). Finally, God sends another who says to Daniel, "O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me" (10:19). There

is nothing negative ever written concerning the life and work of the prophet Daniel. Brother Perry Cotham has well written:

Daniel's life and ministry bridge the entire 70 year period of the Babylonian captivity. Not only did he minister for the full duration of that time as a prophet and government official, but he continued on after Babylon was overcome by the Medes and the Persians in 536 B.C. (9).

Herein we are introduced to a young man, a prophet of God, who was among the first captives taken into Babylon, and who was enabled to minister for 70 plus years and to see God's people released from 70 years of captivity. Many Bible scholars estimate that Daniel must have lived to be close to 90 years of age.

Daniel was a contemporary with another great prophet of God, Ezekiel. It is noteworthy that Ezekiel classed Daniel, along with Noah and Job, as great examples of righteousness (14:14, 20; 28:3). In this lesson, as we seek to learn about this man who was righteous and greatly beloved of God, we will approach this study in the form of an acrostic lesson which, when completed, will spell out the name of Daniel.

“D” = DEDICATED

Daniel was one of the youths carried out of Jerusalem into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.). Daniel and his three young companions had many noble qualities worthy of emulation by young and old alike. We see his resolution of heart to his convictions in Daniel 1:8: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.”

Many youth today have the idea, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” However, Daniel and his friends did not entertain the thought: “When in Babylon do as the Babylonians do.” Daniel had determined at an early age that he was going to serve the Lord God. I was eleven years of age when I informed my parents that I fully intended to become a Gospel preacher. Soon, I will have kept that resolution of heart for forty years, the Lord willing. The time to determine to do what is right is in the days of youth: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecc. 12:1). The wise man Solomon instructed parents: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6).

Daniel and his companions were offered meat (which was either unclean or had been offered before idols) and wine (strong drink). Daniel 1:8 concludes: “Therefore he [Daniel] requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” Daniel and his companions had the attitude of Peter and other apostles in Acts 5:29: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

They requested a trial of eating pulse (i.e., grains, barley, rye, etc.) and water to drink. Young people and not so young ought to have nothing to do with strong drink (Pro. 20:1; 23:29-32; Gal. 5:19-21). At the end of the trial, Daniel and his companion’s faces had the appearance of being fairer and their flesh fatter than their counterparts. Thereby, they were granted their dietary requests on a permanent basis. Daniel had the dedication to firmly but kindly say, “**No!**”

“A” = ACQUAINTANCES

Daniel chose good friends. They had been taken into captivity together. Conquering nations would frequently give new names to their captives as a sign of dominance and control. In Daniel 1:6 the Record reads, “Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.” *Daniel* means “God is my judge,” *Hananiah* means “the Lord has been gracious to me,” *Mishael* means “he who comes from God,” and *Azariah* has the meaning, “Jehovah has helped.”

Many are now wondering, “What about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?” Daniel 1:7 declares: “Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.” These were Babylonish names designed to alienate these young people from their homeland and their religion. *Belteshazzar* means “the treasure of Bel,” *Shadrach* is “the inspiration of the sun,” *Meshach* in the Chaldee language signifies “he who belongs to the goddess Sheshach,” finally, *Abednego* has the meaning “servant of Nebo.” *Nebo* is a corruption of *Nego*, one of numerous gods of Babylon. We see the full intention of trying to negate their allegiance and loyalty to the Lord God. “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33—ASV). Daniel chose good friends. Daniel was “a lover of good men” (Tit. 1:8). This is a sure-fire mark of one who is right with God. He chooses good men to be his friends.

In the words of an old spiritual, written concerning Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “They would not Bend—they would not Bow—they would not Burn!” These three companions were faithful in the face of the fiery furnace! Daniel 3 informs us of a golden image that had been set up, and at a given signal of music all the people were expected to “fall down and worship the golden image” (3:5). Now, notice the penalty for failure to bend and bow: The same hour they were to “be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace” (3:6). Those young men had grit—but more important than that—they had God! In Daniel 3:15 we learn that the king gave them a second opportunity to bend and bow to the golden idol. Satan is persistent in tempting man to fall from God (Gen. 3:2-6; Mat. 4:3-10). We admire these young men in their answer: “We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:18). Because they would not bow—God saw to it that they would not burn! Daniel 3:17ff recounts how Jehovah was able to deliver these men because of their faithfulness to Him. The men who cast the three Hebrew children into the furnace were slain by the flame of the fire. Three men were cast into the fire, but the king beheld a fourth! They would not burn, because they had been with God! In Matthew 7:13-14 Christ informs us that there are two pathways in which every man must travel: one is narrow, and the other is broad. The broad way leads to eternal burning. Let us determine not to bow to this world (Rom. 12:1-2) so we will not **burn!**

“N” = NEVER GIVE IN

In 1941, Winston Churchill gave perhaps his most memorable speech. In part he stated:

Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

Mr. Churchill felt the urgency and need for all to stand fast in the face of World War II. His remarkable words helped to unify the allies against powerful enemies.

As you think on these things, think of Daniel and his companions who would never give in to the enemy (Babylon). Let us determine to stand fast in our loyalty to God today. Paul penned, “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). May we never give in to the Devil and his devices (2 Cor. 2:11). It requires courage and boldness to be found faithful in our service to God. May we dare to be a Daniel in the 21st century!

In a world of immorality and wickedness of all sorts, there is a need for men and women who would stay the course of righteousness. Paul commanded:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:10-12).

As we learn from Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, may we **never** back down from doing that which is right—regardless of the consequences! That will require courage and conviction on our part. In recent times we have learned that even among the Lord’s people we have too many Captain-D elders and far too many Captain-D preachers. There is a chain of fast-food restaurants named “Captain-D’s.” If you examine their menu carefully, you will note one item is listed as “boneless chicken.” *Boneless* means “lacking in back-bone” and *chicken* is slang for “spineless or coward.” That is what is meant when we talk about certain elders and preachers who are too cowardly to take a stand for the cause of Truth. These men ought to learn from Daniel and his companions. May we **never** give in to the Devil; may we **never** give in to the world; may we **never** give in to compromising brethren who would take us away from God! Let us so live, that when we come to the end of life’s way we can say with Paul: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:6-7ff).

“T” = INTERPRETER

The late brother J. T. Marlin impressed upon me many years ago the importance of Daniel as an **interpreter** in a powerful study of Daniel 2. Brother Marlin stated:

It is important to know when the Kingdom had its beginning, it is a matter of identity, to distinguish it from other Old Testament agencies and also from the religious institutions of man’s origin. The church is almost 2,000 years old.

We find a wonderful example of Daniel's powers of interpretation as he relates to Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation. No doubt we have all marveled at the remarkable prophecy and interpretation (2:31-45).

The Head of Gold

The Babylonian Empire would be the beginning of this prophecy of kingdoms versus the Kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar served as king of Babylon from 606 until 561 B.C. This kingdom fell in 536 B.C. Prophets besides Daniel told of the downfall of Babylon centuries before the fact. How could they know these things? "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 [Spirit]" (2 Pet. 1:21).

Another chapter will deal in detail with the interpretation of the writing on the wall (Dan. 5). However, briefly we learn that Belshazzar (grand-son of Nebuchadnezzar) would also rule over Babylon. During a feast there was a certain handwriting on the wall.

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians (5:25-28)

In other words, your days are numbered, you are weighed and found wanting, and the kingdom will be divided. This came to pass exactly as Daniel prophesied!

The Breast and Arms of Silver

Cyrus, king of Persia, and Darius, king of Media, formed an alliance and overcame the Babylonian Empire. This resulted in the Medo-Persian Empire which lasted from 536 until 331 B.C. Bear in mind that the Old Testament pages of inspiration ceased during this time. In other words, God ceased to speak through His inspired prophets for about 400 years. The words of inspiration would begin again in Luke 2:25ff. As the late, brother Mardell Lynch used to teach in his classes, "These 400 silent years were anything but **silent** in regards to history and the fulfillment of Daniels' interpretations and prophecies." He frequently pointed out that one ought to study Daniel before one studied the 400 silent years. Certainly, secular history shows such to be the case, but that is another study within itself.

The Belly and Thighs of Brass (Bronze)

Alexander the Great ruled the great Grecian Empire from 331 to 323 B.C. Following the demise of Alexander, his generals fought continuously over dominance in this troublesome time. Most historians agree that Antiochus Epiphanes was the last real ruler for Greece. Certainly, as one considers the contributions being made by these various empires of the condition of the world (i.e., language, culture, wealth, and transportation, etc.), we are better prepared to appreciate Paul's writing; "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). The American Standard Version reads, "born of a woman, born under the law."

The Legs of Iron and the Feet of Iron and Clay Mixed (63 B.C. until A.D. 476)

Some suggest that Rome was not established as a world power until the coming of Octavius Caesar (30 B.C.). "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44). *These kings* referred to the time of the kings of the Roman empire. The event which Daniel (and other prophets of God) foresaw was the establishment of the church of our Lord! "Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold" (2:45). Sure enough, when we come to a study of Acts 2 and the beginning of the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16; Mat. 16:18), the Caesars of Rome then ruled the world (cf. Mat.3; Luke 3).

Christ had foretold that the power would come when the Spirit came (Luke 24:49). He had said the kingdom would come with power (Mark 9:1). The power came with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit came with power on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Therefore, the Kingdom of God came on Pentecost. Peter, the powerful preacher of Pentecost proclaimed: "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). The Law went forth from Jerusalem in the establishment of the everlasting Kingdom that day, just as foretold by Daniel, Isaiah, Micah, Joel, and other great prophets of God! Let us quickly follow the promise of God. Jesus Christ stated: "And behold, I send forth the **promise** of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49—ASV). Luke continues his treatise to Theophilus: "being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait

for the **promise** of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me” (Acts 1:4, ASV). Peter proclaimed on Pentecost the fulfillment of this promise as he said:

This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the **promise** of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear (Acts 2:32-33, ASV).

Although Daniel told of dreams and visions, forgotten or feigned forgotten, notice he told the true interpretation even when it was not popular. It is like the late brother Marshall Keeble speaking of 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season.” Brother Keeble said, “That means preach it when they like it, and preach it when they don’t!” Daniel told the meaning of all dreams and visions in the book of Daniel, even when it must have been very unpopular. May God raise up more Daniels to preach the Word faithfully, without fear nor favor to any man, any school, any publication, any board of directors, or any paycheck!

If we had the letter “H” to work with in the name of Daniel we would have to make mention of the **humility** of Daniel in all his interpretations. He never took the credit for the interpretations which he gave.

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart (Dan. 2:27-30).

“E” = EXAMPLE

As we have progressed through this acrostic lesson based on the life of Daniel, we have certainly noticed many areas in which he is worthy of emulation. Paul penned, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). In the same place the American Standard Version says, “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.” Certainly, all children of God should seek to imitate Christ Jesus our Lord. However,

there are many noble men of Scripture who would serve as good role models for all Christians; Daniel is one of those men. We would do well to follow in his footsteps regarding his dedication to God, in his choosing friends who are close to God, and in his courage and conviction to **never** give in to outside forces and factors of the world about him. Let me add to these that Daniel is a great example for you and me when it comes to the subject of prayer! Daniel remembered to approach God in prayer daily. When Solomon dedicated the temple he had built in Jerusalem, he beseeched God to hear the prayers of Israel if they should ever be taken captive away from that land and the temple structure. Remember that he specifically asked God to hear His people's prayers if they would face toward the temple in Jerusalem and pray to Him.

Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name (1 Kin. 8:47-48).

Daniel was familiar with this teaching. He prayed toward Jerusalem three times every day. Daniel remembered God in prayer even while far away from his home. His actions in prayer were determined by what he was and **not** where he was!

Many times Christians are far removed from their home congregation, and they forget God. They forget how Christians are to behave. They forget about the truth of Matthew 6:33. They forget to pray! The late brother J. T. Marlin used to teach: "Prayer ought to be the key to every day and the lock to every night."

Daniel 6 sets the stage for the great saga of "Daniel and the Lion's Den." What led up to Daniel's being cast into the den of lions? Recall that Daniel stood high in the government of Babylon because of the service rendered to king Nebuchadnezzar, King Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and perhaps King Cyrus, as well. Nebuchadnezzar had made Daniel governor over the whole province of Babylon. Darius had made him one of three presidents to whom his 120 princes or satraps (Dan. 6:1ff) gave account. Brother George W. DeHoff has written:

Little men are always jealous of those above them. The enemies of Daniel could find no fault with his administration. He was a politician who was faithful to God. They sought to make his religion a crime and thus ruin him because of his goodness (372-73).

Herein, we are informed that a man **can** be a politician and be faithful to God at the same time. It is difficult to do especially in our day, but can be done. May God give to us such a man in our land, for the highest office in America. Let us all remember Proverbs 14:34: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." America needs to learn the lesson of Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks, and the Roman Empire. When they were displeased with God, then He took no pleasure in them! We, as a nation, have attempted to remove prayer from our public schools, we have sought to remove the words "one nation under **God**" from our pledge of allegiance, and are attempting to remove the phrase "in **God** we trust" from all our currency. Americans need to ask themselves the question: "Where are we headed as a nation?" We have all heard and used the expression, "God bless America." Nowadays, the question is: "Will God bless America?" or "Why should God bless America?"

"L" = LION TAMER

Let us return to the account of Daniel 6. The jealous officials of the land caused the king to make a decree that all requests should be made **only** to the king for a space of 30 days (6:6-9). Daniel 6:10 informs us that "Daniel knew that the writing was signed." That writing is the decree of King Cyrus. Yet the verse goes on: "his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Daniel continued his prayers to God just as he had always done. The nature of a law with the Medes and the Persians was that it could not be revoked or reversed. The evil politicians knew the law well enough to set this very clever trap for Daniel. All the kings of the land seemed to have liked Daniel, yet there have always been bad men around ballot boxes, and such will ever be the case.

Impressed upon the minds of all who knew Daniel was the scene of him going into a pit of lions for his conviction and loyalty to God. King Darius admired and respected Daniel at all times. Daniel would be somewhere near 80 years of age as he is cast into the den filled with lions. In Daniel 6:14-15, we see that the king is reluctant in carrying out

this sentence against Daniel. He must yield to the pressure of the law. Please note the high compliment he pays to Daniel: “Thy God whom thou servest **continually**, he will deliver thee” (6:16). A stone is set to seal Daniel and the lions together for the night. In Daniel 6:17-18 we are informed that: (1) The king went to his palace, (2) he fasted all night, (3) his usual entertainment was taken away, (4) sleep fled from him, and (5) he arose **early** and hastened to the lion’s den. **Faith** is contagious. Daniel had faith in his God. Notice the king’s question: “O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest **continually**, able to deliver thee from the lions?” (6:20).

He posed the question directly to Daniel, in anticipation of hearing Daniel say in reply, “My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me” (6:22). Daniel is extricated from the den of lions with not so much as a scratch or bruise. In those days a man’s family had to pay for any mistakes the man made. Such is surely seen:

they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den (6:24).

Have you ever wondered what words the wives of these men had for their husbands prior to being thrown into the den of lions?

However, Darius wrote another decree for all people, nations, and all languages in the earth. What a fitting tribute to the God of Daniel and my God:

I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he *is* the living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion *shall be even* unto the end (6:26).

CONCLUSION

In the man Daniel, we behold the **power** of God, the **providence** of God, and the **position** of God (6:26)! Daniel was willing to serve but not willing to sin! As God is steadfast, may we ever be steadfast to Him (1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 6:19).

Let everyone of us have the courage and the conviction of heart to **dare to be a Daniel!**

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NONCONFORMITY

DANIEL 1

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout every age, man has been subject to a Divine pattern. Noah was given a Divine pattern by which he was to build the ark. God commanded:

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this *is the fashion* which thou shalt make it *of*: The length of the ark *shall be* three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; *with lower, second, and third stories* shalt thou make it.... Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he (Gen. 6:14-16, 22).

God was very specific in regards to what He required of Noah. Divine pattern was also to be adhered to during the Mosaic period. God was definitive in regards to His instructions to the children of Israel and did not tolerate anything to the contrary. The actions of Nadab and Abihu serve as evidence.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD (Lev. 10:1-2).

Nadab and Abihu lost their lives because they did that which God “commanded them not.” When God authorized the building of the altar of burnt incense, He instructed Aaron to “offer no strange incense thereon” (Exo. 30:9). The pattern which Nadab and Abihu followed

is quite different from the one followed by their father, Aaron, not too long after their deaths. God told Aaron:

And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring *it* within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that *is* upon the testimony, that he die not (Lev. 16:12-13).

The New Testament also teaches a pattern for man today. Paul, by inspiration, commended the Christians at Rome:

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart **that form** of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18).

These individuals were only “made free from sin” after they obeyed the pattern given to them by God. Had they obeyed any teaching other than “that form of doctrine,” they would have still been “servants of sin.”

Paul told the Church at Galatia: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). The pattern for salvation and the explanation for how one is added to Christ’s Church is first recorded in Acts 2. Those Jews heard the Word of God (2:14) and “were pricked in their heart” (2:37), proving they believed what they heard. They repented of their past sins and were baptized to have those sins forgiven (2:38), and because of their obedience God added them to His church (2:47). By following that same pattern, man can be saved and added today to the Church for which Christ died. God also designed a pattern for the way in which He desired His people to worship Him (John 4:24) and a pattern for how He wanted His Church organized (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

By providing man with a pattern to observe, God has excluded all other patterns, thus furnishing us with examples that we **are not** to follow. The apostle John states: “Beloved, **follow not** that which is evil” (3 John 11). “Peter and the *other* apostles answered” the Jewish leaders of the first century: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Paul beseeches

brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And **be not conformed to this world**: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Throughout antiquity, man has desired to fit in and conform to his surroundings.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And 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** (1 Sam. 8:4-5).

God's chosen people rejected Him as their King (8:7) and longed for an earthly king to be like all the nations round about them. God warned His people not to "follow a multitude to *do* evil" (Exo. 23:2). The danger that awaits those who do follow the crowd of unrighteousness is utter destruction. The **majority** rejected the preaching of Noah, and they all died in the flood (Gen. 7:22-23). The **majority** followed after the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and were overthrown with fire and brimstone (19:24-25). We should be extremely wary when men contend that we should agree with them simply because "everyone else does." It has been said many times and in many ways: "Wrong is wrong even if everybody is doing it. Right is right even if nobody is doing it."

I am convinced that this is the reason some hesitate so long before taking a public stand against clear-cut error. **If** their friends and family would recognize and oppose this error, they would do so, but they do not want to lose their goodwill or evoke their condemnation; so they remain silent. When the **majority** see no cause for concern or alarm, it is difficult for other Christians (including many preachers and elders) to see any real need to speak up and resist these gradually growing changes in the congregation that are leading to full apostasy. In many congregations this attitude of going along with the thinking (or, lack of thinking!) of the majority has permitted false doctrine and practice to run rampant (Galloway 3)!

Many who once preached these same words now find their comfort by allying themselves to those who they believe to be in the majority. God calls upon Christians to be "a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9), a people who come out from among those who are wicked and practice error (2 Cor. 6:17). The inspired Paul states: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 The. 3:6). The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are not to fashion themselves after the ways of the world nor after that which seems to be most popular. In regards to error and the practice of sin, Christians are to be "non-conformers." As

we preach through the Major Prophets, we find a perfect example of this “Nonconformity” by examining the first chapter of Daniel.

NONCONFORMITY IN REGARDS TO WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, AND UNDERSTANDING

Around 606 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar laid siege upon Jerusalem and began reigning sovereignly over Judah. This inaugurated the period of history commonly referred to as the Babylonian Captivity and, as prophesied by Jeremiah, would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:1-14; 29:10). At the onset, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that the most attractive in appearance and intelligence be separated for service in the king’s palace.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring *certain* of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes; Children in whom *was* no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as *had* ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel *the name* of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego (Dan. 1:1-7).

The record proves that Daniel was a very wise individual. It is also proven that Daniel was well-educated in the ways of the Hebrews. Nebuchadnezzar was banking on the fact that, since these young people were able to grasp and become skillful in the knowledge of their own people and customs, they would be able to learn the arts and sciences of the Chaldeans. Judah was

not a nation distinguished for “science,” in the sense in which that term is now commonly understood—embracing astronomy, chemistry, geology, mathematics, electricity, etc.; but their science extended chiefly to music, architecture, natural history, agriculture, morals, theology, war, and the knowledge of future events; in all which they occupied an honorable distinction among the nations. In many of these respects

they were, doubtless, far in advance of the Chaldeans; and it was probably the purpose of the Chaldean monarch to avail himself of what they knew (Barnes 98).

No doubt God's providence was involved in placing Daniel in the king's palace, but Daniel, himself, played an important role as well. Daniel's studious and industrious character made it possible for God to use him in His grand and Divine will. God works providentially today, but He will not do for us what we have the ability to do for ourselves.

Those youths, especially Daniel, were set to be the great prevailing force for God in righteousness, not only in the city of Babylon, but also throughout all Babylonia; and not only for those Israelites, but also for the Gentiles as well. Those men had been endowed from the start with unusual talents, and they had allowed God to use them to His glory. God uses men to His glory today—in fact, everyone who, in keeping with his free moral agency, will allow himself to be so used (Turner 24).

God made man with the ability to reason (Isa. 1:18) and make proper conclusions (Mat. 16:1-4) and expects us to do just that.

We, too, are to be studious and industrious. Christians have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ and have thus been made slaves to Christ (1 Cor. 7:22-24). We, then, are to submit ourselves to the Cause of Christ. "The church is subject unto Christ" (Eph. 5:24) and as such, Christians should subject themselves to the Lord's bidding. Christians are to be ever-growing "in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). In so doing, we, like Daniel, can place ourselves in a position to be used by God and His Divine providence.

Even the apostle Paul, just prior to his martyrdom, asked Timothy to bring him "the books" and "the parchments" (2 Tim. 4:13). Though we do not know exactly what was written in those books or upon those parchments, we can ascertain the fact that Paul was a reader and found such a practice to be of great value during his preaching career. Christians have been given such charges as "study to shew thyself approved unto God," rightly divide the "word of Truth" (2:15), "preach the word" (4:2), and "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). All of these admonitions require diligence in regard to our study habits. It is easy to understand why such diligence must be given to the study of God's Word. "All scripture *is* given by inspira-

tion 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). The Gospel of Christ “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16), and it is the Standard by which all men will be judged (John 12:48).

NONCONFORMITY IN REGARDS TO RESOLUTENESS

Not only did Daniel have a good knowledge and understanding of God’s Will, he was resolved to practice and obey God’s Will no matter what consequence it would bring.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which *are* of your sort? then shall ye make *me* endanger my head to the king. Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king’s meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse (Dan. 1:8-16).

Daniel was resolved to obey God. He “purposed in his heart” long before this event took place that he would not “defile himself” by doing something that was contrary to God’s Law.

The chief reasons why Daniel would not eat meat from the royal table were probably these three:

1. Because they ate unclean beasts, which were forbidden by the Jewish law.
2. Because they ate, as did the heathens in general, beasts which had been strangled, or not properly bled.
3. Because the animals that were eaten were first offered as victims to their gods (Clarke 564).

Daniel’s resolve was well-known.

Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault;

forasmuch as he *was* faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God (6:4-5).

Those who sought to do harm against Daniel knew that he was faithful to God. Because his life was consistent with the commands of God, his enemies could find no fault in him. They knew, however, that because of his resolve to obey God, they could contrive a plot that would pit him against the laws of the land.

All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask *a petition* of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing *is* true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which *is* of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day (6:7-13).

The three Hebrew lads who accompanied Daniel into captivity and service in the palace—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—also exhibited this resolve. They

answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (3:16-18).

These three knew that God had the power and ability to save them from this fiery death, if it was His Will to do so. However, they were resolved to walk into the furnace rather than bow to a false god, even if it was not God's will to deliver them from that fire.

One thing certain is that the commitment and dedication of those youths to their God, under those bitter circumstances, continues to be astounding. Christians everywhere, especially those of the United States of America, should give themselves to some soul-searching reflections. There is a definite place for dedication and/or commitment to the principles of Christianity, in both doctrine and morals (Turner 19).

The Psalmist states: “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart...shall never be moved” (Psa. 15:2, 5). If we *purpose* in our hearts to do only that which is right and in accordance with God’s Law, we too can stand resolute like Daniel and his three friends. We must be “strong and very courageous” just as God charged Joshua “to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (Jos. 1:7). The apostle Paul served God “with many tears, and temptations” (Acts 20:19) and was “ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13). Yet, Paul commented: “**none of these things move me**” (20:24). Paul was not moved by persecutions (17:5-6), discouragement (2 Cor. 11:3), unfaithful brethren (11:26), severe criticism (10:10), nor by the failures of others (Gal. 2:13). If we are resolved, and *purpose* in our hearts to simply obey God, none of these things will move us either.

NONCONFORMITY IN REGARDS TO GOD’S FAVOR

Our God, He is alive, and “the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:17). In a general sense, God gives His favor to all men, “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). But in a specific sense, God’s Divine favor is only given to those who are faithful to Him. Paul states: “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). Spiritual blessings are reserved for those who have been baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), added to His Church (Acts 2:47), and remain faithful to Him (1 John 1:7). “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). His spiritual blessings are offered to all men. Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). However, only those who are obedient to God’s conditions can appropriate such grace.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah all received the favor of God because of their faithfulness. The latter three walked through fire, literally, to remain in fellowship with God. Their “nonconformity” brought glory to God.

[Nebuchadnezzar] commanded the most mighty men that *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, *and* to cast *them* into the burning fiery furnace.... Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, *and* spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, *and* spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come *hither*. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. *Then* Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed *be* the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God (Dan. 3:20, 24-28).

This miraculous event, and the accompanying glorification of God, was made possible because three young men chose not to conform to any one person or any one law that would set them at odds with God. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus expounded: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 5:16).

God’s providence prevailed for those youths in every way, but God did not do for them that which they could do for themselves. They are to be credited for their having learned and made good use of all the knowledge and opportunities that were afforded them (Turner 20).

Daniel, because of his own faithfulness, received favor from God that was only befitting an obedient prophet.

Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.... As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed

with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers that *were* in all his realm. And Daniel continued *even* unto the first year of king Cyrus (Dan. 1:9, 17-21).

Once again, because Daniel was willing to work hard, study, and live faithfully in harmony with the Truth, he was in a position to be used by God.

Daniel came to be numbered with the great prophets along with Moses and Isaiah. He became the hub, so to speak, of a prophetic circuit with Jeremiah in the homeland, him [Daniel] in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and Ezekiel among the captives in Babylon. What providence! God had not forgotten His nation, nor had He forgotten His people of the Gentile nations (Turner 23).

RESULT OF NONCONFORMITY

Jesus states: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). Those, whose error is exposed by the obedience of a faithful child of God, will have hatred in their hearts. “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20). Jesus reiterates: “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake” (Luke 21:17) and the apostle John reminds us: “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). Those in error want everyone around them to be in error so they do not feel out of place, shame, or disgrace. Anyone who does not conform to their ways makes them feel uneasy and, perhaps, embarrassed.

However, nonconformity can also bring about great respect. First, one can respect himself because he has stood firm to the Word of God rather than caving to men. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” (Dan. 1:8). Because of Daniel’s decision, he remained pure and had nothing for which to be ashamed or regretful. Second, one can receive the respect of others. Though the majority will show disdain towards those who do not conform to their ways, some will think highly of an individual who is unwavering in his stand for Truth. Daniel found “favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs” (1:9) and the respect he had of those in high places allowed him to continue “*even* unto the first year of king Cyrus” (1:21). “The king

made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise *men* of Babylon,” and Daniel was able to convince the king to “set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon” (2:48-49). Third, nonconformity spawns respect from God. In regard to Daniel and his three Hebrew compatriots:

God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.... And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers that *were* in all his realm (1:17, 20).

APPLICATION

There are many aspects in a Christian’s life that need to be examined to ensure that he is not conforming to the world, but rather, being transformed by the renewing of the mind, that he “may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Let us examine just a few.

Christians Must Be Nonconformists With Respect to the Way We Dress

We must adorn ourselves “in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety” and in clothing which professes godliness (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

The word *modest* in this passage means “*decent*.” So much of the clothing that is worn by people of the world (both male and female) is not decent. Yet it is sad to see many in the church conforming to the world in this respect. Anything that is too short, too tight or too revealing is not decent to be worn in public anywhere at any time. Why would any Christian woman (or man) dress in such a way as to incite lust on the part of the opposite sex? What is wrong with mixed swimming? The near nakedness. There is no such thing as modesty at the public pools and beaches (Hester 32).

Christians Must Be Nonconformists With Respect to Alcohol

Sadly, many who claim to be Christians see nothing wrong with “throwing one back” every now and then. Others contend that alcohol is suitable for certain special occasions (i.e., weddings, anniversaries, etc.). The Bible reveals: “Wine *is* a mocker, strong drink *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Pro. 20:1). The wise preacher also declares that they who give in to the temptation of alco-

hol are they who have woe, sorrow, contentions, babbling, wounds, and redness of eyes (23:29).

Christians Must Be Nonconformists With Respect to Gambling

State-sponsored gambling (i.e., the Lottery) has caused great harm, not just to the economy it was supposed to improve, but also to the continual deterioration of our society's morals. Gambling is a violation of the Golden Rule (Mat. 7:12). For one to win the lottery, he must desire that all others who play lose their money. Gambling also violates God's Law in regards to covetousness. Those who gamble covet that which others possess. Covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5); therefore gambling is as well. Gambling is in direct opposition to God's desire for how man is to attain finances—"if any would not **work**, neither should he eat" (2 The. 3:10).

Christians Must Be Nonconformists With Respect to Language

Many people sing praises to God on Sunday and take His name in vain Monday through Saturday. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). The words we say around our friends and co-workers who are not Christians should be the same honorable speech we use around Christians.

Christians Must Be Nonconformists With Respect to Dancing

The world sees dances and proms as innocent fun for today's youth. However, the modern dance is the epitome of "lasciviousness" and "revellings" which are referenced as "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19), and "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21).

CONCLUSION

It will do well for all Christians to study the nonconformity of Daniel and his three friends. It is important to note that not conforming, merely for the sake of being at odds with someone or some group of individuals, is not profitable in any way. The only nonconformity that is acceptable to God is that which **does** conform to His will. Individuals who do not conform to God's commands, and rebel against the Truth, do so to their own ruin. God will take

vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruc-

tion from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 The. 1:8-9).

Daniel was a nonconformist only because he desired to do that which was right in the sight of God above all else. We must do the same. We should strive to “grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). We must purpose, now, that we will stand on the Truth of God’s Word without wavering, irrespective of any consequence that would do us harm. Facing unimaginable persecution, first century Christians were encouraged to

fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

Our continued growth as Christians and our resolve to stand on the side of Truth will yield the favor of God. Let us conform to God’s Word, and in so doing, separate ourselves from that which conforms to the god of this world.

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NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

DANIEL 2, 7

Ken Chumbley

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INTRODUCTION

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar, as recorded by Daniel the prophet in Daniel 2 is a vital part of biblical authority. It is also a prophecy that has been misused by many modern false teachers to teach doctrines contrary to the Bible and contrary to the interpretation given by Daniel. We will also study Daniel's dream (Dan. 7) since both dreams related to the same prophetic events.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

Daniel 2 begins with these words: "And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, where-with his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him" (2:1). When he awoke, he could not remember what he had dreamed. Have you ever had that experience? This troubled the king so much that he "commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams" (2:2). He then explained to them that he had a dream and that he was "troubled to know the dream" (2:3). The Chaldeans told the king to relate to them the dream, and they would interpret it for him. He then makes it clear that the dream had "gone from [me]" (2:5), and he makes clear what

would happen to them and their families if they do not interpret the dream. He also promises to reward them should they be able to bring back to his mind what he had dreamt about and interpret it for him. The Chaldeans repeated their request for the king to tell them the dream and they would then interpret it for him. The king recognized that they were stalling for time and made clear that he would follow through with his threats. The Chaldeans protest that the king is “asking the impossible,” for no man on earth had that ability. They further state that the only way such could be done was if the gods chose to do so. By now the king was angry, indeed furious; he commanded all the wise men to be destroyed. Daniel 2:13 tells us that Daniel and his fellows were among those who were to be slain.

When Daniel is confronted by the captain of the king's guard, Arioch, who had been given the task of slaying the wise men in Babylon, he asked: “Why *is* the decree *so* hasty from the king?” (2:15). Arioch told Daniel what had occurred. Daniel then goes to the king and requests time to show the king the interpretation of the dream. Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, requesting that they “desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret” (2:18), that they might not perish with the wise men of Babylon.

The secret was then revealed to Daniel in a “night vision,” and he blessed the God of Heaven (2:19-23). Daniel then asked Arioch not to destroy the wise men and to bring him before the king. Arioch approached Nebuchadnezzar and informed him that he has found a man of the captives of Judah that would make known the interpretation to the king. The king asked Daniel: “Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?” (2:26). Note how Daniel responds to the king:

The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these (2:27-28).

Note how Daniel pointed out to the king that men could not do this but that “there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets,” giving the glory to God. He then explained to the king that the dream the king had had was for the purpose of making known to the king what was to come to pass (2:29). Further, Daniel makes it clear that he had received

not the interpretation for his own sake, nor did he have more wisdom than any others. He next described the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed (2:31-35).

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM— THE FOUR KINGDOMS

Consider how Daniel the prophet interprets the dream (2:36-43). Who are the kings that Nebuchadnezzar saw? He begins by pointing out that Nebuchadnezzar was represented by the “head of gold” (2:37-38). Thus, there is no uncertainty: The “head of gold” refers to the Babylonian Empire represented at that moment of time by Nebuchadnezzar the king. Daniel points out that it is the God of heaven who had granted him “a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory” (2:37) and had made him ruler over all. Dub McClish makes this observation when discussing this passage:

The dominion of the Babylonian monarch over men, beasts, and birds was also a gift from God; not merely by his own might and certainly not because of any personal moral merit, he possessed such authority, but because of God’s great plan of the ages that necessitated such a ruler as Nebuchadnezzar. It is obvious from the first point of interpretation that each of the four parts of the image are representative of successive kingdoms of great extent or empires (80).

In Daniel 2:39 we see the next two kingdoms or empires briefly mentioned. “And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee” which refers to the image’s “breast and his arms of silver” (2:32). This has reference to the Medo-Perisan Empire, under the domination of Persia that toppled Babylon in 538 B.C. Note that in the interpretation of the dream Daniel refers to it as being a kingdom that was “inferior” to Babylon. Also, in Daniel 2:39, reference is made to the third kingdom; in the image it is described as “his belly and his thighs of brass” (2:32). Daniel states concerning this third kingdom that it “shall bear rule over all the earth” (2:39). This third kingdom is the empire founded by Alexander of Macedonia (the Great). His might was clearly established over the Persian Empire and all of the smaller nations as he marched eastward from Greece and Macedonia beginning in 331 B.C. It has been suggested that the reason why these descriptions of the second and third kingdoms are so brief here is that they are dealt with more fully in other chapters, particularly Daniel 7. We will have more to say on that later.

In Daniel 2:40-43, the fourth kingdom is described. In the image, it is represented by its “legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay” (2:33). This fourth kingdom is described as one that would be strong, symbolized by the iron, which would subdue and crush any that got in its way (2:40). Yet, the kingdom would be divided, described as being “partly strong, and partly broken” (2:42), which would come about by the mingling of others with it that were different from it. Just as iron and clay which will not combine and become a cohesive unit, this kingdom will partly strong and partly weak. This clearly defines the Roman Empire with its Caesars that had its beginning in the century before the birth of Christ and became a dominant world power through the influence of Julius Caesar about 45 B.C.

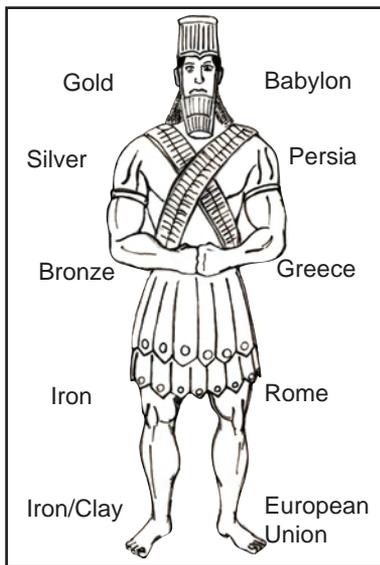
A FIFTH KINGDOM?

Although Daniel clearly identifies only four kingdoms, it has been argued by some latter-day *prophets* that Daniel actually spoke of five kingdoms. The fifth kingdom, they say, is represented by the ten toes—a confederacy of ten kingdoms. Note the following taken from some Bible Correspondence Courses put out by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the first from the Voice of Prophecy in the United States and the second from the Faith Course produced in Australia:

Fifth, the mixture of iron and clay in the feet and toes is explained. “And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, THE KINGDOM SHALL BE DIVIDED”—Daniel 2:41. Rome was to be divided into ten kingdoms. Did this come to pass? Certainly it did. During the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era ten distinct independent nations became established within the boundaries of Western Europe. Thus the prophecy was literally fulfilled (3).

The prophecy of these verses said that the world empire of Rome was to be broken into pieces. It is interesting to note that as there were ten toes on the feet of the image, so Western Rome was divided into ten parts. In Daniel 7 you will discover that the four beasts parallel these four major divisions of the image of Daniel 2. The ten horns of the fourth beast in chapter 7 are declared to be “ten kings” or kingdoms which grew out of the old Roman Empire (4).

Although both of these come from the Seventh-Day Adventist church, a study of Premillennial teaching will show that such is the general view among them. The following images show how the image is often portrayed by Premillennialists [I slightly altered both figures in these graphics for the book—editor]. The first is from Wayne Blank and is on a Church of God website. The second is from David R. Reagan



and is on a website devoted to the *Rapture*. In the first image, note the reference to the “European Union.” What did they reference before that came into being and what will they do when that *union* is dissolved? In the second image, note that Reagan actually cuts off the feet and toes from the image and inserts a “prophetic gap”!

When we examine the text of Daniel’s interpretation of the dream, we note that the feet and toes are still the fourth kingdom. In both Daniel 2:41 and 42 we see the use of *the* and *it* referring back to Daniel 2:40 which speaks of the fourth kingdom.

It is still “the” kingdom, not another, and in “it” was “the strength of iron” (2:41). Although not welded together or unified, the fourth kingdom is still one kingdom. Thus, all that is stated in Daniel 2:40-43 has reference to the fourth kingdom—the Roman Empire.

In the second quote from the Seventh-Day Adventists, mentioned previously, it calls attention to “ten toes on the feet of the image.” When one reads Daniel 2, it can be clearly seen that there is **no** mention of “ten toes” representing “ten kings.” In fact, the passage does not even mention the number of toes! It is true that Daniel 7:24 mentions ten horns as ten kings; however, one has no right to transfer one figure to the other. If one does, there is the problem of an eleventh horn (7:8) that eliminates three of first horns; thus there are eight left, and it is then that the kingdom is established (7:27), as we shall note shortly. However, to transfer this imagery of Daniel 7 to Daniel 2 would force one to say that an eleventh toe grew and chopped off three others, thus having eight toes instead of ten. It would be difficult to know where to add one toe and eliminate three others! It is best to leave the horns of Daniel 7 in chapter seven and not try to transform them into the toes of Daniel 2. Further, if one insists on making the toes of the image into kings, then one still has a problem with trying to find a fifth kingdom as kings usually ruled under an emperor, like the Herodian kings in Pales-

The Gentiles in Prophecy

	Nebuchadnezzar’ Dream (Daniel 2)	Daniel’s Dream (Daniel 7)	The Kingdoms Propesied
	Gold (Head)	Lion	Babylonian
	Silver (Breast & Arms)	Bear	Medo-Persion
	Brass (Belly & Thighs)	Leopard	Greek
	Iron (Legs)	Beast with Iron Teeth	Roman
PROPHETIC GAP			
	Iron & Clay (Feet)	Ten Horns	Antichrist
	Stone	Son of Man	Jesus Christ

tine. Again, if these “ten kings” are yet to come in this “fifth kingdom,” as is argued, then one would have a strange image with an odd shape. The body of the image represents about six hundred years, the feet and toes—to represent the “fifth kingdom” that is yet to be established—representing about two thousand years already!

Clearly, Daniel, in describing the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream and in interpreting the king’s dream, speaks only of four kingdoms. Any who would seek to teach a “fifth kingdom” has an over-fertile imagination, seeing things that are absent from the text.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As Daniel described the image that Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream, he stated:

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (2:34-35).

Then, in the interpretation, Daniel continues:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream *is* certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (2:44-45).

Premillennialists teach that this kingdom that the God of heaven was to set up is still in the future. They base this theory on their false interpretation that insists on a fifth kingdom, as discussed previously. Such has been popularized by Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which made a big splash in the 1970s when it was made part of popular reading as a result of being sold in grocery stores and supermarkets. Other books and movies have since been produced that have followed the same general theme.

Has the "God of heaven" set up a kingdom "which shall never be destroyed," or is that kingdom still to be established in the future? Let us examine the Scriptures and see what they teach. First, who are the kings referred to in Daniel 2:44? It has reference to all of the kings since the image is still standing at the time the "kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" is set up. Furthermore, the "stone cut out without hands" was to smite "the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces" (2:34). The stone was to smite the image on the feet—**not the toes!** Thus, the kingdom was to be set up when the image fell. The image fell when it was smitten by the stone cut out of the mountain. This took place during the period of the Roman Empire.

While agreeing that the fourth kingdom was the Roman Empire, premillennialists teach that the Roman Empire was divided into two. First was the ancient Roman Empire that existed during the earthly ministry of Christ and for some centuries later. Then there is to be a revival with a modern Roman Empire. Some insist that this is the Eu-

ropean Union. I reject this fanciful notion concerning the revived Roman Empire and the establishment of a political earthly kingdom (as taught by these false teachers). I strongly object to the European Union for purely political reasons. It is as an effort by some to bring about a political union ruled from Brussels to accomplish that which Hitler and the Nazis could not accomplish.

For this to fit, premillennialists have to argue that the kingdom that was promised did not come into existence because it was rejected by the Jews. Then the "Church Age" was substituted until the revival of Rome in their supposed fifth kingdom of the "ten-toe confederacy." Note the following.

R. H. Boll, a *Gospel preacher*, who bought into this notion in the early part of the 20th Century, wrote:

Jerusalem had missed her chance. What would have happened had she understood and seized upon her opportunity? Who can doubt what? He certainly would have gathered them 'as a hen doth gather her brood under her wing's (Matt. 23:37) and bestowed on them all the riches of His grace and His salvation. And nothing could then have hindered the fulfillment of the promises God had made to their fathers. But it is sufficient for us to know that Jerusalem did reject her king and failed of her opportunity; and though the offer was made to her in good faith, her rejection of the invitation was foreseen, and made a factor in God's larger plan (80-81).

Note the sentence: "And nothing could then have hindered the fulfillment of the promises God had made to their fathers." The truth of the matter, despite Boll's protestations, was that the promises were **not** "hindered" in any way, but they were indeed fulfilled (see Acts 13:23, 32-33).

Many believe the kingdom was postponed because they have been led to believe that the kingdom was to be earthly and political in nature. Let us, for a moment, suppose that kingdom was to be of such a nature and not a spiritual kingdom. Was Jesus rejected by the Jews as an earthly king? At this point, let us note what Jim Bishop wrote concerning the expectations of the Jews at the time of Christ:

It is at this point that Israel and all its people would be brought back from the corners of the world and would again share their own land—the ten tribes living together.... For example, many of the sages would proclaim that when all of this had come to pass the city of Jerusalem would glitter in the sun and the Sabbath boundaries for walking would be marked with pearls and precious stones. The city and its walls would be moved upward to a height of about nine miles. The Messiah

would decree the new temple which he would build and which in all its beauty would have five things restored.... One insisted that once the temple had been restored, it would naturally follow that all of the ancient rituals of Moses would be restored too. This seemed reasonable to many, because one could not imagine a Messiah whose teachings were not compatible with those of Moses ... the angels of God would cut gems forty-five feet square and set them in the outer gates of Jerusalem; the windows and the gates would be made of precious stones; the walls would be made of silver and gold encrusted with gems; jewels would be strewn about the streets for all Jews to take; Jerusalem, the Holy City would be as large as Palestine and Palestine would be the size of the world.... The fifth world monarchy would be raised to take the place of the fourth (the Roman), Jerusalem would be the capital of the world and the home of the Messiah (76-80).

Clearly, the Jews who lived during the earthly ministry of Christ were anticipating and expecting a physical kingdom with a Messiah that would lead the people to shake off the shackles of Roman domination after which He will reign supreme from Jerusalem. The Jews were expecting an earthly king to set up an earthly kingdom—the very same kind of king and kingdom of which Premillennialism speaks.

While here on earth, the Lord was tempted by Satan to gain the kingdoms of the world:

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Mat. 4:8-11).

Later, Peter offered the same shortly after he had confessed that Jesus was the Christ (16:16): “Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (16:22). Jesus quickly rebuked him: “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (16:23).

On two separate occasions Jesus could have become an earthly king if that is what He had come to establish. John records one of these occasions: “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:15). The Jews were ready to make Him king by force, but such was not to be as He departed from them. Again, we read, at the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed *be* the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest (Luke 19:37-38; cf. Mark 11:9-10).

The problem was that the Jews were looking for an earthly king to defeat Rome and were unaware of the fact that Christ's kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36).

In the *Schofield Reference Bible*, the Bible of preference among premillennialists, the verses that show Christ was not rejected as a material, earthly king, and those verses that show that Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, have no comments from Schofield. However, his note in which he seeks to show the rejection of Christ as King is connected with Matthew 11:20-27. However, a reading of this passage shows that it does not even mention the kingdom!

Premillennialists do not deny the Scriptures that teach that the kingdom was "**at hand**" during the earthly ministry of Christ (Mat. 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9). How could the kingdom have been said to be "**at hand**" when the ten-kingdom (toe) confederacy which they speak of referred to a future aspect of the Roman Empire? Either the prophecy referred to the first century or sometime in the future—they cannot have it both ways! If it concerned the first century, then it came to pass—or Daniel is a false prophet.

Scripture gives clear evidence that the Kingdom of God, prophesied in Daniel 2:44, has been established. We have previously noted passages that indicate that John the Immerser, the Lord, the twelve, and the seventy all preached that the kingdom was "**at hand.**" Were all of them wrong? Again, the Lord said, "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1; cf. Mat. 16:28). Note that He taught some would not taste of death until the kingdom came. Either it came in the First Century, or we have some still living that would be almost 2000 years old! The apostles were told to wait for power (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49). That power came on the first Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:1-4). Prior to Acts 2, all references to the kingdom point forward to its establishment. From that time on, all references speak of it as being in existence (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9).

Some would teach that the kingdom spoken of by Paul and John, in the previous passages, is different from the kingdom spoken of by Daniel. However, note what Daniel states: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44). The inspired writer of Hebrews wrote to the Hebrew Christians: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). If Christians are in a “kingdom which cannot be moved,” where is there place for another kingdom to be set up and move this kingdom? It is not there!

We might ask, what follows if the kingdom of Daniel 2:44 was not established in the First Century?

1. The Fourth Empire (that of Rome), which existed in Jesus’ day, was skipped and the kingdom will be set up in a future Roman Empire.

2. The present kingdom of heaven (Col. 1:13) is not mentioned in Daniel 2:44; thus the kingdom based on the precious blood of Christ is ignored in prophecy.

3. Mark 1:14-15 (and other passages) could not have set forth the time for the kingdom to be “at hand” since the time was not right.

4. Israel was wrong in expecting the kingdom of Daniel 2:44 when John the Immerser was preaching (Mat. 3:1-2), for the Rome existing then was not the Rome under which the kingdom was to be set up.

5. The present kingdom which is “not to be shaken” (Heb. 12:28) would be taken away and another put in its place.

6. Christ’s present reign will not continue to the end of time (the conquest of death and judgment), yet Scripture teaches that such is the length of the present reign (Acts 2:34-36; 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

7. If the kingdom has not yet been established, why are there no references to this in the New Testament?

Premillennialists read the Old Testament passages about a kingdom, throne, tabernacle, etc., and reach the conclusion that a material regime is predicted. They read Daniel’s prophecy and see in it a promise to set up an earthly kingdom with Jesus on a literal throne in Jerusalem. They do not find where Jesus ever established this kind of kingdom, throne, or tabernacle; therefore, they conclude that the kingdom must have been postponed. It does not seem to occur to them that they have

reached the wrong conclusion as to the nature of the kingdom God had in mind.

We are confident that we have proved that the kingdom prophesied in Daniel 2:44 has been established. God has a kingdom that shall stand forever.

DANIEL'S VISION—DANIEL 7

In this chapter there is the revelation of the vision (7:1-14) and then its interpretation (7:15-28). Daniel sees four beasts arise that represent four kingdoms; then he sees the kingdom of the Son of Man. This chapter is parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's dream of Daniel 2. It has been suggested that Daniel 2 shows what might be described as the more human features of the four kingdoms (that of a human being), whereas the scene in the Daniel 7 sets forth the more cruel aspects of the four kingdoms (as shown in their more beastly nature).

In Daniel 7, four beasts arise representing four nations. A "little horn" arises, but before any interpretation of it is given, judgment is pronounced on the beasts. Then a new power is seen, referred to as the "kingdom of the Son of Man," which is universal and eternal. The "little horn" with its persecutions is viewed, but the horn does not prevail. Following that, a final interpretation is given.

The first beast is the lion, representing the Babylonian Empire (compared to the "head of gold" in chapter two). The second beast, a bear, represents the Medo-Persian Empire (the "breast and arms of silver" in chapter two). The third beast, a leopard, represents the Grecian Empire (the "belly and thighs of brass" in chapter two). The fourth beast is described as "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly," representing the Roman Empire ("legs of iron, his feet part of iron and of clay" in chapter two). Further information is given concerning these beasts, but we will note just one with reference to the fourth beast of which it is said: "and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it *was* diverse from all the beasts that *were* before it; and it had ten horns" (7:7). The reference to "iron" and devouring and breaking in pieces clearly links it with the Roman Empire. There is also reference to "ten horns."

It is these "ten horns" that have been the cause of much controversy, particularly when premillennialists have sought to align them with the "toes" of Daniel 2. We have already discussed the danger of merging the imagery of chapter seven with chapter two and the fact that there

is no mention of the number of toes in the interpretation of the image of chapter two. Premillennialists want to make these “ten horns” into kingdoms that did not exist in the period of the Roman Empire but transfer them to a later period. Currently, with many, this is the European Union that now has far more than *ten kingdoms*. However, beyond that, premillennialists have a further problem in that an eleventh horn, a “little horn” arises that plucks three of the others out at the roots (7:7), thus leaving eight horns, whereas in Daniel 2 there is no indication of any of an extra toe growing and consuming three of the other toes. There is disagreement among Bible scholars as to exactly what or whom the “ten horns” and “the little horn” represent. Some think that the “little horn” is a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes who greatly persecuted the Jews, but that creates a problem in that he was a part of the Greek Empire, not the Roman. Others think that “the little horn” is a reference to the Papacy. Again, others think that the “ten horns” are Roman leaders beginning with Pompey 63 B.C. and that the “little horn” has reference to Vespasian A.D. 69-79. Rex A. Turner makes a good case for this position. He concludes his argument by stating:

One thing is certain: Even if one could not establish beyond any doubt that Vespasian was not the “little horn” of Daniel who made war against the saints and prevailed, he did, nonetheless, make war with the saints, or chosen people of God; and further, he did prevail against them as no other ruler ever did. Vespasian was God’s instrument for the punishment of his chosen people, a people who had rejected the Christ of prophecy and had blasphemously put the Holy One to death on a Roman cross. Vespasian was not of the Caesarean dynasty. He began as a small power—a little horn—but he became a mighty power; and he spoke great great things. A reasonable conclusion is, therefore, that Pompey was the first of the ten horns of the diverse beast, and Vespasian was the eleven horn which came up last (27).

Daniels’ statement is of particular interest:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed (7:13-14).

Premillennialists seek to use this passage to show that Daniel confirms that Jesus will come from heaven in the clouds to set up the kingdom that was “postponed” when the Jews, supposedly, rejected Jesus as

King. We say “supposedly” as we have previously proved that the Jews did not reject Jesus as King, but they rejected the fact that His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36). They wanted a king that would lead them as an earthly ruler to overthrow Rome—the kind of king that premillennialists claim He is coming to set up when He returns. However, Daniel does not support that contention. What Daniel sees is the Son of Man coming **from** earth on the clouds **to** the heavenly realm where the “Ancient of days” resides, and He came to receive a kingdom. In short, Daniel shows that he saw how the kingdom (the church) would be set up (or established) during the days of the Roman Empire by the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) when He was raised from the dead and ascended “with the clouds of heaven” to the “Ancient of days”—to Jehovah. Luke gives us the historical facts of this event (Acts 1:9-11) by showing that Jesus did go up in the clouds, being watched by the apostles. Both Mark and Peter confirm this.

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand (Acts 2:32-34).

Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him (1 Pet. 3:22).

CONCLUSION

We have examined the dream that God gave the privilege to Nebuchadnezzar to see concerning things that were to come in the future, specifically concerning the fact that God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. We have seen the interpretation that God gave to Daniel to give to the king and to record for our learning. We have seen the similarities and differences between Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in Daniel 2 and Daniel's vision recorded in Daniel 7. Further, we have noted some of the error and false teaching of premillennialists regarding these passages.

May we be truly thankful for the kingdom that was established in the First Century—the church of our Lord—and for the privilege that is ours as Christians (that is, those who have been obedient to the Lord's will and have fulfilled the terms laid down in Scripture) to be citizens

in the kingdom of God and members of the Lord's church that He purchased with His blood that was shed on Calvary's cross.

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“IF...BUT...WILL”

Daniel 3

Roelf L. Ruffner

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INTRODUCTION

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon” (Dan. 3:1).

The sight of this idol must have been impressive, sitting on that plain near the capitol of the largest empire the world had seen in the ancient world. No doubt it took months to construct by the servants of this mighty monarch. Some of the workmen may have been Hebrew slaves: craftsmen, artisans, smiths, nobles, and defeated soldiers (2 Kin. 24:16). These Israelites were paying for the sins of their fathers who had “filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon” (2 Kin. 24:4)—as well as their own sins in breaking virtually every commandment God had given Israel at Mt. Sinai. Their hope was drained by the consequences of their sins. Here they were in a distant land, building an image for the man who had conquered their land, destroyed their temple, and enslaved them. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion” (Psa. 137:1).

Yet, in the midst of their bitter regret there was encouragement. They had probably heard of the four young Jewish nobles who were now working in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael,

and Azariah. They had arrived with the first group of Jewish captives from Jerusalem about 606 B.C. (Dan. 1:1-2). Nebuchadnezzar (actually Nebuchadnezzar II) had given them new, pagan names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (1:7). These men had refused to transgress the Law of Moses by eating the king's food (1:8). In return for their faithfulness, God gave them "knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams" (1:17). Because of Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he made him "ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon" (2:48). He "sat in the gate of the king" (2:49), probably as the king's counselor. The other three were set "over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (2:49) or Daniel's assistants. Their promotion had probably thrilled the Jewish slaves at Dura. It gave them hope that Israel's exile would end someday, as the prophets foretold. "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer. 29:10).

Now these men faced the greatest challenge of their young lives: Would they bow down to this idol or not? Would they defy their king and patron, Nebuchadnezzar, and risk an agonizing death or would they obey the God of their fathers, the God of heaven and earth? Would they do what was right, as the Law of Moses taught them, or obey the law of the king? The challenge Moses had given their ancestors almost 1000 years before still stood.

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deu. 30:19-20).

Every day the Lord looks upon our lives, along with His myriads of angels, and hopes that we will do what is right. Today, bad choices lie at every level of our existence—especially when the alternative involves persecution. None of us are immune to bad choices that can lead to sin—young, old, *mature* Christians, women, men, elders, deacons, and even preachers.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13).

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

Our Lord wants us to grow and strengthen our faith by overcoming the temptations to sin that Satan throws in our paths.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (10:13).

This is one reason why God has left us the Old Testament—to show us examples of spiritual strength and courage. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are examples of faith in action and the enduring truth that “God is faithful.” Let us examine this testing which they endured. Let us remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!

THE SETTING WAS INVITING TO SIN

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of an empire that stretched from India to Egypt, had built an image and set it up somewhere outside of Babylon (*Dura* merely means “boundary” in the ancient tongue.). He was a great builder.

Nebuchadnezzar’s reign was a time of great building activity in Babylonia, and the extant remains of Babylon are substantially from this period. He strengthened the fortifications of the city by rebuilding massive inner and outer walls, which, with the river and a chain of fortresses north and south of Babylon constituted a powerful defense system around the capital (Saggs 119).

Nebuchadnezzar was a member of a tribe of people from the southern part of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) known as the Kaldu or Chaldeans. They had migrated to Babylon in the Eighth Century B.C. while it was under Assyrian domination. In 625 B.C. the Chaldeans led by Nabopolassar, gained power in Babylon. In league with the Medes, Nabopolassar sacked Ninevah, the Assyrian capital, in 612 B.C. and freed Babylon from Assyria.

Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not; The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the pransing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The

horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses (Nah. 3:1-3).

Nebuchadnezzar was Nabopolassar's oldest son and heir. Towards the end of his reign, Nabopolassar seemed to have made his son co-ruler or at least commanding general of his army. At the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. Nabopolassar defeated Pharaoh Neco, driving Egypt from Syria and Palestine. In April of that year Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne.

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar built this image on the plain of Dura to show the Babylonians that he was his own man, as great as his father. Some have suggested that he was trying to honor his false God—Marduk. Whatever the reason, it was a massive structure approximately 90 feet high and 9 feet wide (a *cubit* was 18 to 21 inches in length). A statue of this size of solid gold would weigh 4,131.4 tons. This may have been more gold than the whole world possessed at that time, and therefore commentators suggest it was a wooden structure covered in gold plating or gold leaf.

Some commentators even think that the image may have had the form of an obelisk with a nine-foot base and towering another ninety feet upwards. Others suggest a tall platform with an idol of gold on top. Whatever its construction, it was an impressive sight. It had behind it all the might of the Oriental despot who had it constructed.

What did the image actually represent? Whose likeness did it bear? Scholars and commentators have wondered about this for hundreds of years because the text does not say. Some say Nebuchadnezzar was trying to restore honor to the chief god of the old Babylonians, Marduk; so the image was in the likeness of this false god. Marduk was the god of order, and empires need a sense of order. However, most modern artists' depictions show the image as one of Nebuchadnezzar himself—or at least resembling the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream as interpreted by Daniel in chapter 2: "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible" (2:31). Knowing the ego of this king and his pride (4:29-30), it is probable that the image was in his likeness. And why not worship his likeness? For Nebuchadnezzar the throne was a semi-divine position, since the king was the people's

emissary to the gods. "Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods?" (Jer. 16:20).

The king commanded that all government officials turn out for dedication of this monstrosity. They included "princes" or satraps, "governors," "captains" (rulers of a small districts), "judges" (chief diviners/astrologers), "treasurers," "counselors," and "sheriffs" (judicial lawyers) (Dan. 3:2). The pressure to conform to the will of the king was heavy, especially for high government officials such as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. It was the patriotic thing to do! It was the religious thing to do, unless you believed in the God of Abraham. For these three it would have been a sin to bow down to any god but the one true God (Exo. 20:3-5).

To make this sin more enticing, the king ordered that all should bow down when they heard the sound of "cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick" (Dan. 3:5). To this day all kinds of mechanical instruments of music are used in pagan religious ceremonies; their sight and sound appeals to the senses. Even pseudo-Christian churches today use every mechanical musical instrument and electronic musical device known to man "to create the proper worship experience" and to create an emotional frenzy, causing those present to open up their pocketbooks. Little has changed in 2,500 years! "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" (John 4:23).

The penalty for failing to bow down at the sound of the music was a horrible, searing death in "a burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:6). This furnace may have been built specifically to threaten the disobedient. These three young men had a decision to make. Either they obeyed Nebuchadnezzar, their master and patron, and live, or they obeyed a 1,000 year old commandment written by the finger of God and thus risk a humiliating, agonizing death. Would you and I have obeyed the king?

The setting for sin today can often be just as enticing. Though the Christian may not face a literal "fiery furnace," he faces a penalty for being a nonconformist.

Several years ago a teenager was invited by his friend to attend a revival at a Baptist church in a small town. This young man was a member of the church of Christ, but he went anyway because his friend

had attended a Gospel meeting with him. At the end of the revival the speaker gave the “altar call” in which he and the organist wailed away at the need for all to “claim Jesus as your personal savior” and other subjective drivel. The speaker asked all who had done this to step to the side of the auditorium. All that were left in the isles were this teenager and another friend. The false teacher continued using every device from his denominational bag of tricks to persuade them to “pray the sinner’s prayer,” but neither relented. This young Christian loved the Truth more than he feared the “fiery furnace” of humiliation and non-conformity. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam. 4:7).

Another scenario comes to my mind. A certain preacher was “trying out” at a congregation of God’s people. This congregation seemed to be a “sound” one. There were many opportunities to serve the Lord and preach the Gospel in the community. The elders treated his family and himself like royalty. They were taken on a tour of the city. His Bible class and Sunday morning and Sunday evening sermons were well received. He met with the elders and they painted for him the picture of a very good working arrangement: housing, good salary, generous benefits, an annual Bible lectureship to direct, and most important of all—spiritual support. They seemed like men he could work with, who loved the Truth. But then the reoccurring question(s) of our day arose: “How do you feel about supporting Apologetics Press, the Gospel Broadcasting Network, the Southwest Institute of Bible Studies, and the Brown Trail School of Preaching?” Friendships, family ties, and allegiances going back in time are self-evident. The preacher had to make an important decision. He wanted this job so much that he could taste it! But he has convictions and does not want to compromise his conscience. Outside the door sit his wife and family, hoping he will be offered the position.

I personally have faced this “fiery furnace” many times. I told the truth, as I understood it, with a heavy heart that these once-faithful works were no longer worthy of support by the church. The evidence is obvious and overwhelming to the faithful Christian. I saw eyes look downward many, many times. I believe the choice is between God and “mammon” (Mat. 6:24). “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jam. 4:17).

THE PRESSURE TO SIN WAS IMPOSING

There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:12).

The men who spoke against Daniel were Chaldeans, as was Nebuchadnezzar (3:8).. It was also the title of a group of advisors to the king which was overseen by Daniel (2:2, 48). It was obvious that they were not just aiming their attack at these three men but the whole Jewish nation. Their enemies hated them for who they were. They were accusing them of treason.

Where was Daniel during this time?

The absence of all reference to Daniel in this chapter is an indirect proof of the antiquity and genuineness of the book of which it forms part. The reasons for Daniel’s absence may easily be imagined. He might have been sent on official duty to a distant province of the empire, or, though this is not so likely, his presence at this festival might not be required. A prosaic but possible solution of Daniel’s absence might be illness. If he were known to be incapacitated by sickness from taking part in any public function, the Chaldeans would not damage their case by referring to him (Thompson).

Perhaps Daniel was there and like his friends did not bow down? I do not think he would have dared to miss this dedication. One may only image how jealous the Chaldeans were at having a “foreigner” and a “monotheist” over them. Perhaps they thought that Daniel was too powerful for them to strike directly; so they complained about his three friends. This smacks of a political maneuver on their part.

Evil finds comfort in numbers (Exo. 23:2). Crowds of sinners committing sin in unison have a certain appeal to the spiritually weak and the easily led. For example, today our nation is being bullied into accepting special rights for homosexuals. Celebrities, politicians and “clergy persons” line up to bow down before the idol of “equal rights” and “tolerance” for perverts. But God’s word still stands:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6. 9-10—NKJV).

How long will it be before the reading of these verses in public will be considered a “hate crime”? America, why did God destroy Sodom,

Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain? “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. 1:32).

What follows is one of the many examples of human pride and arrogance recorded in the Bible. In “rage and fury” Nebuchadnezzar has the three Jews hauled before him. He tries to browbeat them into compliance. He warns them that he will throw them into the fiery furnace if they refuse to “fall down and worship the image which I have made” (Dan. 3:15). With impudence he adds, “and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (3:15), implying he is the greater “god.” This is the same monarch who had previously said to Daniel, “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings” (2:47).

Today, some in the Lord’s church would have us bow down before their man-made endeavors. They seem to think that if the brotherhood does not support their college, school of preaching, evangelistic endeavor, television network, disaster relief effort, etc., the church of Christ will go extinct! Brethren, how about the work of the local body of Christ? Why can the local church not do these things and bring glory to the bride of Christ? If there is some question about a policy, practice, supporter, or even a speaker on their program their response reminds me of Nebuchadnezzar’s. They begin to label you a “new anti,” a “radical,” or a “troublemaker.” They might issue some veiled threat that you will be blackballed by all “balanced” brethren. I say, “So what?!” Brethren, let our allegiance in this life not be to some lectureship, school, program, well known preacher, or even a brotherhood publication, but to Christ the King. “Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1Tim. 6:15).

SIN IS OVERWHELMED BY OBEDIENCE TO GOD

To Nebuchadnezzar’s credit, he did seem to give the three another chance to obey his edict. Lesser men would have crumpled under the pressure, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose not to bow down to the image at the sound of “the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer” (Dan. 3:15). Their forefathers had bowed down to a golden calf and been punished by God at Mt. Sinai. Just a few years before, the prophet Ezekiel had seen seventy Jewish elders worshiping pictures on a wall in Jerusalem; they tried to justify it by reasoning: “The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth” (Eze. 8:12).

These brave men, with predetermined purpose, courageously answered this pagan tyrant: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter" (Dan. 3:16, ASV). Their minds were made up and no matter the severity of the punishment; they were prepared to disobey their earthly master in favor of their heavenly Master.

The early church of Christ had such resolve—the determination to do God's will whatever the cost. When the apostles stood before the Sadducees, the jealous liberals of their day (Acts 5:17), they were told: "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (5:28). The response of the apostles and the Holy Spirit was profound: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (5:29). This shook the high priest and his stooges: "they were cut *to the heart*, and took counsel to slay them" (5:33; cf. Heb. 4:12).

The three men had complete confidence in God. They knew that the God of Abraham was able to deliver them out of harm's way. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand" (Dan. 3:17). Their calm determination was based on God's command:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing 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 to them, nor serve them (Exo. 20:4-5).

In other words, their love and reverence of Jehovah and His command was greater than their fear of Nebuchadnezzar.

Yet, perhaps the most amazing response they gave to this despot is found in Daniel 3:18: "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Their faith and determination was not based on whether or not God saved them from the furnace. God might not choose to save them. They trusted that God would do the right thing, whether it involved saving them or not. This is an incredible declaration of faith! For them there was a greater fear than death; it was the fear of disobeying the God they loved and trusted. "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psa. 118:6).

For most people today, God is the proverbial man on the white horse that will save them from all their troubles. In fact, some in the

neo-pentecostal heresy seem to demand in prayer that God grant them all their wants and save them from all their troubles. This lacks the humility of spiritual maturity and correct scriptural reasoning. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (Jam. 4:3). This attitude neglects the will of God. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14).

Even if God had chosen not to rescue His three servants, He would still be worthy of obedience and worship. God had been good to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, preserving their lives and giving them honorable positions. Was their faith and love of God based on His blessings alone? Satan inferred this against Job centuries before:

Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face (Job 1:9-11).

Job withstood the onslaughts of Satan with his faith intact. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15).

Standing before this self-styled “king of kings,” the three men threw down their own gauntlet before Nebuchadnezzar “that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:18). As they say in Texas: “I don’t care if it hare-lips the governor, I’m not gonna do that!” They were resolved to be faithful to God whatever happened, and they expected to die for their public stance. This is a victory of faith. In one swoop, they overwhelmed the forces of darkness by simple obedience to God. They were teaching this pagan prince something about the faithful followers of the living God—their God was worth dying for. This should be the position of every faithful child of God as they face the seemingly overwhelming forces of apostasy and so-called “conservative” compromisers. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:12-13).

THEY WERE REWARDED FOR THEIR FAITHFULNESS

Now was the moment in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would be tested to the fullest. The Bible records: “Then was Nebuchad-

nezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed” (Dan. 3:19). He may have considered them disloyal. How dare they dishonor his god Marduk and humiliate him in front of his people—the Chaldeans! He ordered that the furnace of punishment be heated “seven times more than it was wont to be heated” (3:19). He commanded his top warriors to throw these three men bound into the furnace. His men lost their lives when exposed to the heat of the furnace as they cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into its flames. These three brave men paid the price for their disobedience of men.

Sinful men are often angry when the children of God refuse to conform to their wishes. Mighty Pharaoh was angered when asked by Moses and Aaron to release the ancient Israelites from Egyptian bondage. The high priest and his brothers were angered when the apostles refused to stop preaching the Gospel (Acts 5:28). “The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul” (Pro. 29:10). Today, denominations get riled up when faithful preachers denounce them and their pernicious doctrines. Even compromising brethren holler, “Gossip!” and “Too negative!” when their fellowship of doctrinal error is exposed. Yet, we should not feel alone. We should remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Speaking of the ancient worthies, the inspired pen wrote:

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 (Heb. 11:33-34).

The mighty, prideful Nebuchadnezzar fully expected to hear shrieks of pains and the smell of cooking flesh coming from that furnace. Instead his pagan heart was stopped by what he saw.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God (Dan. 3:24-25).

Many have wondered through the centuries about the identity of the fourth figure in the furnace. *The Son of God* could also be translated “a son of the gods” (ASV). Was this an angel or was this an appearance of the Son of God, a theophany, a manifestation of God to man? In Daniel

3:28 Nebuchadnezzar does refer to him as an “angel,” but the Aramaic word used may stand as a designation of deity. Whoever he was, his appearance was proof to all that God was miraculously protecting His three servants: these faithful sons of Abraham. It was also proof to Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans that Jehovah was greater than anything their idolatrous minds could imagine.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace. The king and his entourage “saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them” (3:27). It was an amazing miracle. As is often the case with miracles of the Bible, the result was two-fold. Besides the three men being left unscathed, Nebuchadnezzar and his counselors witnessed the power of the one, true God and the power of biblical faith. The king proclaimed that God “sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God” (3:28). Being the ever fickle monarch, Nebuchadnezzar now issues a decree praising the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and he promised death to anyone who defiled His name. He also promoted the three Jewish men. That night there was probably rejoicing among the Jewish slaves in Babylon. God had remembered His one thousand-year old promise:

And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD (Lev. 26:44-45).

In some ways, this account is no different than what faithful Christians face in our own age. When the enemies of truth and righteousness throw them into the furnace of ridicule, ostracism, and blackballing; they survive and come out spiritually whole. Their persecutors are *astonied* by this and witness the resiliency of biblical backbone. New congregations take root and long established ones are reinvigorated which do not compromise the Truth. Preachers pack up their books and find these congregations who demand a “thus saith the Lord” for all they do. The reason is that there was someone else with them in their furnace of affliction. He has promised that He is with us if we are with Him and do His will: “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of

the world. Amen” (Mat. 28:20). As the isolated, friendless servant of Christ, Paul wrote almost two thousand years ago:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. 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 (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

Let us stand tall in “God’s eternal purpose” (Eph. 3:10-11). Let us “fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12). Let us “gird up the loins” of our mind (1 Pet. 1:13). Let us remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!

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GOD RULES

DANIEL 4

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INTRODUCTION

Students of the Book Divine should **never** skim over the bountiful lessons contained in the Old Testament. Those who see the Old Testament as *boring* or *cumbersome* are cheating themselves of multiple hours of fruitful study. The “major” prophets offer all Bible teachers a plethora of information from which to teach. In fact, teaching from the Old Testament on a regular basis contributes to the strengthening of local congregations. Brethren who are generally ignorant of the Old Testament are often weak in the Faith.

Daniel 4 should remind each child of God’s ultimate power over all forms government. With that thought in mind, this lesson will be presented in seven sections: (1) The History Behind Nebuchadnezzar’s Rise To Power, (2) The History of Nebuchadnezzar and Judah, (3) The Haughty Spirit of Nebuchadnezzar, (4) The Humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, (5) The Humility of Nubuchadnezzar, (6) The Higher Powers and Jehovah, and (7) The Higher Powers and the Christian.

Daniel 4 can also be approached in the following manner: (1) The **wonders** God performed, (2) The **worries** the dream caused, (3) The **wonderment** dream caused, (4) The **warnings** the king received, and (5) The **witness** the king gave.

THE HISTORY BEHIND NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S RISE TO POWER

The theme of Daniel is “to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (4:17). Therefore, no king ascends to a throne or a nation arises without God’s knowledge. Nebuchadnezzar’s rise to his kingship did not go unnoticed by Jehovah.

In 705 B.C., Sennacherib rose to power as king of Assyria. It was he who besieged Jerusalem (701 B.C.) and subsequently lost 185,000 men at the hands of Jehovah in the process (Isa. 37:36). At that time, Assyria had already conquered Israel and taken many of its citizens captive. Because of God’s mercy, Judah was spared the fate of her “sister” to the north. Undeterred, Judah did not turn away from the multiple sins that had sealed Israel’s destruction. In response to Judah’s rampant sins, God sent the prophets Isaiah and Micah to Judah in an attempt to turn the sin-laden kingdom back to Jehovah. Tragically, Judah rejected the message of these faithful prophets, thus sealing her doom.

Nabopolassar of Babylon freed his city from Assyrian control and thus began the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In 626 B.C., Nabopolassar, at the death of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, revolted and declared himself king of Babylon, a country which had previously been under the control of Assyria (Turner 6-7). In 612 B.C., the Babylonians and Medes together defeated the Assyrians and destroyed the capital city of Nineveh. The final battle between the Assyrians and Babylonians was fought at Haran, home of the patriarch Abraham, in 609 B.C., bringing to an end the rule of one of the cruelest nations in history.

His son Nebuchadnezzar succeeded Nabopolassar in 605 B.C. In that same year, Babylon defeated Egypt in the Battle of Carchemish on the upper Euphrates River and was now the lone *superpower* in the ancient Near East. Rex Turner, Sr., comments:

The falling Assyrians took up a last stand at Charchemish [609 BC] on the upper Euphrates. Nabopolassar was ailing, and he dispatched his son Nebuchadnezzar to the conflict at Carchemish to put down the uprising. Pharaoh-necoh, king of Egypt, on the pretense of aiding the failing Assyrians had gone up for the spoil; whereas Josiah, king of Judah, had gone out in behalf of the Babylonians. Josiah was killed in the action with Pharaoh-necoh (2 K. 23:28-30; 2 Chr. 35:20) (7).

THE HISTORY OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND JUDAH

The second generation of Israelites emancipated from Egypt were warned not to dishonor the Covenant between them and God (Deu. 28). In response to their disobedience, God promised to set over them a king who would cause them to serve other gods (28:36). Too, they would be despised and ridiculed by their oppressors (28:37). In addition, they would be attacked and taken captive by a nation who was ruthless in nature (28:49-58, 63). As a result of the promised severe siege, God foretells of inconceivable acts of cannibalism among His people whom He had called to be holy. Likewise, their population would be drastically reduced (28:62). As well, they would be scattered among other nations (28:64). Lastly, they would not find rest in the nations where they would be scattered (28:65). What a vivid and frightening portrait of suffering God painted for His chosen people! Notably, all of the above tragedies did occur when Assyria besieged and took Israel captive around 721 B.C. Judah suffered a similar fate almost 120 years later at the hands of the Babylonians.

Hezekiah, one of the righteous kings of Judah, motivated by pride, showed his treasures to the Babylonian ambassadors who were sent to congratulate him on his recent recovery from illness (Isa.39). In response, Jehovah dispatched Isaiah with a dual message of rebuke and prophecy, foretelling Judah's Babylonian captivity.

Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, *even* from Babylon. Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that *is* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and *that* which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Isa. 39:3-7).

The above prophecy takes place over one hundred years before its fulfillment. Homer Hailey believes the date of Isaiah 39 to be around 703 B.C. (173). Jehovah's omniscience and omnipotence are duly noted. At that time, Babylon was still subject to Assyria. Furthermore, contributing to Judah's "date with the destruction" was Manasseh's treasonous reign, which took Judah to new lows of spiritual wicked-

ness (2 Kin. 21). His abominable deeds are described as being even more wicked than the heathen nations God removed from the land of promise (2 Chr. 33:1-10).

Second Chronicles 36 confirms the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah 39:3-7 and Jeremiah 25:9-11. God commissioned Nebuchadnezzar to punish the **uncaring, unthankful, unholy, unrepentant** citizens of Judah. Then the writer gives a graphic *unedited portrait* of Judah's deep-rooted transgressions—the impetus for God's justified wrath (2 Chr. 33:14-16). He then reveals the tragic consequences of ignoring the Lord's command for repentance (33:17-21).

Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand (36:14-17).

The aforesaid verses noticeably teach: (1) the **mercy** God extended to Judah by dispatching **multiple messengers**, (2) the **malicious mindset** the inhabitants of Judah possessed, (3) the **maltreatment** the messengers of God received at the hands of the residents of Judah, and (4) the **merciless** torture and death many of the inhabitants of Judah experienced at the hands of the Babylonians. Justly, Judah reaped what she had sown.

THE HAUGHTY SPIRIT OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

As has already been noted, Babylon had the greatest military in the East at the time of Judah's fall. In the first of three campaigns against Judah, Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and his three friends, among others, captive to Babylon in 605 B.C. The next campaign included Ezekiel in 597 B.C. The last campaign included the destruction of the temple and the city itself in 586 B.C. After conducting successful military operations against varied kingdoms and their so-called gods, Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans' confidence level had to be *through the roof*. Babylon was now the envy of many nations, and a great number of countries feared the Chaldeans.

Daniel 2-3 serve as a prelude to chapter four. Recorded in them are encounters Nebuchadnezzar had with the true and living God. It is evident that the Lord was testing the heart of this pagan king. The two encounters could be seen as *two strikes* against this ungodly king because he ignored or “forgot” the fact that the God, whom Daniel served, was far superior to any supposed god he served or even created. On the contrary, one may argue that the two encounters *softened* the heart of the king of Babylon. For he declared to Daniel: “Of a truth *it is*, that your God *is* a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret” (Dan. 2:47). Yet, he did not seek to get to know the God of Daniel. **Conclusion:** He, like so many, simply responded spontaneously to the supernatural events occurring at the time. Because his heart was void of sincerity, he did not seek a relationship with the Almighty. A closer look at Nebuchadnezzar’s statement reveals his acknowledging Jehovah not as the one and only God, but “**a** God” among the “gods.”

Daniel 3 provides even greater insight into the heart of the king of Babylon. Motivated by “mercy,” and wanting to give the three Hebrew boys a *second chance* to worship his created god, Nebuchadnezzar asked the servants of God “*Is it true*, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?” (3:14). Further, he arrogantly asked: “and who *is* that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (3:15). After witnessing the mighty miraculous delivery of God, Nebuchadnezzar concluded:

Blessed *be* the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God (3:28).

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mighty miracle of Jehovah, which led to government policy changes (3:29), but, he was neither convinced nor convicted to the point of seeking after the Lord. Notice once again how he referred to Jehovah as “the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,” not the one and only God.

Daniel 4 opens similarly to chapter two. Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by a dream he had (4:5). He then summoned all his “wise” men to interpret his dream (4:6-7). It is implied in Daniel 2 and 4 that these so-called “wise men” had indeed interpreted some of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams to his satisfaction in the past. These men were, of course,

workers of Satan. However, they were woefully insufficient in their vain attempts to interpret the king's dream. Last, but not least, Daniel was summoned. Ironically, Nebuchadnezzar referred to Daniel by the pagan idiom *Belteshazzar*, which means "Bel will protect" (4:8). He likewise referred to Daniel as the "master [chief] of the magicians" (4:9). When God gave Daniel the interpretation of the dream, its meaning even troubled Daniel to the point that he was speechless (4:19). Once he regained his composure, Daniel, guided by God, gave the king the interpretation of the dream. He informed the king that this matter was decreed by the Most High (4:24).

Apparently, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar had developed a healthy respect for one another over the years. Daniel 4:9, 18, and 19 reveal how the king addressed Daniel—not as a slave or servant, but with respect. In like manner, Daniel's statement, "My lord, the dream *be* to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies" (4:19), is better stated: "Let these things happen to your enemies and not you." Affirmatively, the statement disclosed Daniel's genuine concern for Nebuchadnezzar. In spite of their relationship or the possible consequences, Daniel told the king the true purpose for the dream and what he needed to hear—repent—not what may have *tickled* his ear (4:27).

Suffering from self-imposed *acute Alzheimer's*, Nebuchadnezzar forgot the warning of the great prophet Daniel when he declared: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" (4:30—ASV). Nebuchadnezzar's self-promoting spirit was incompatible with Jehovah's decree of humility. His mind-set mirrors that of the Pharaoh of the Exodus who snootily and ignorantly asked: "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). After demonstrating His incomparable might through several mighty signs, Jehovah sent the pompous ruler a message of rebuke and revelation: "And in very deed for this *cause* have I raised thee up, for to shew *in* thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (9:16).

THE HUMILIATION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

With the words of ungodly pride fresh in his mouth, Nebuchadnezzar experiences the wrath of the Almighty (Dan. 4:31-33). He loses his throne and his mind in an instant. He is literally driven from the

palace to the **pasture**; from **majesty** to **madness** is Nebuchadnezzar's punishment. God's prophecy concerning the Babylonian monarch was fulfilled with perfect accuracy. How fleeting could be fame, power, and riches! Could you imagine his appearance? Concerning Nebuchadnezzar's mental condition, the *King James Study Bible* suggests: "There is a mental illness known as zoanthropy in which a man thinks and acts like an animal. It is also called boanthropy, more specifically, when a man thinks of himself as an ox" (1278).

C. F. Keil comments:

Nebuchadnezzar is driven from among men, viz. by his madness, in which he fled from intercourse with men, and lived under the open air of heaven as a beast among the beasts, eating grass like the cattle; and his person was so neglected, that his hair became like the eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.... This malady, in which men regard themselves as beasts and imitate their manner of life, is called *insania zoanthropica*, or, in the case of those who think themselves wolves, *lycanthropia* (159).

Of course, there are critics and skeptics—some who claim belief in the Scriptures—who allege that this actual event did not occur as recorded in Holy Writ. Albert Barnes responds to the fallacious assertions and fanciful imaginations of some Bible *students*:

Others suppose that the statement here means merely that there was a formidable conspiracy against him; that he was dethroned and bound with fetters; that he was then expelled from the court, and driven into exile; and that, as such, he lived a miserable life, finding a precarious subsistence in woods and wilds, among the beasts of the forest, until, by another revolution, he was restored again to the throne.... It is indeed painful to reflect that such absurdities and puerilities have been in any way connected with the interpretation of the Word of God; sad to reflect that so many persons, in consequence of them, have discarded the Bible and the interpretations together as equally ridiculous and absurd. The *true* account in regard to the calamity of Nebuchadnezzar is undoubtedly the following: (1) He was a maniac—made such by a Divine judgment on the account of his pride, vers. 30, 31. The essential thing in the statement is, that he was deprived of his reason, and that he was treated *as* a maniac (259-60).

The Holy Spirit has spoken at length on man's chief enemy—pride. One of the seven deadly sins is a proud look (Pro. 6:17). Through the wise man, the Spirit warns of the evil of pride.

The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.... *When* pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly *is* wisdom.... In the mouth of the

foolish *is* a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.... The LORD will destroy the house of the proud.... Every one *that is* proud in heart *is* an abomination to the LORD: *though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished.... Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.... An high look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked, *is* sin.... Proud *and* haughty scorners *is* his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.... A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit (Pro. 8:13; 11:2; 14:3; 15:25; 16:5, 18; 21:4, 24; 29:23).

Isaiah 13-14 foretold the fall of the Babylonian Empire 175 years before it actually happened. "Lucifer" is most likely a reference to all the kings of the Chaldean Empire (14:12). Pride was one of the chief reasons for the great fall of the Chaldeans. Jehovah depicts the **end**, the **evil effects**, and the **egotism** of Lucifer:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High (14:12-14).

After revealing the source of his strength to the enemy, Samson, the sullied solicitor of harlots and careless, callous compromiser of the Truth, declared in a spirit of self-deception: "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist [knew] not that the LORD was departed from him" (Jud. 16:20). Samson's **self-deception** led to his **self-defilement**, which nearly led to his **self-destruction** (16:21).

In like manner, the Lord destroyed Herod Agrippa because he was narcissistic (Acts 12). Agrippa ordered the murder of James and had intended to do the same thing to Peter. Through the saints' prayers and God's special providence, Peter was delivered from this child of the devil. Because of his pride, Herod Agrippa paid the ultimate price:

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, *saying*, *It is* the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied (12:21-24).

Herod Agrippa is only one of numerous individuals in the Scriptures whose pride preceded their fall.

The Abbott Andrews Terrace neighborhood, located in Brunswick, Georgia, was full of pride. Why? One of its residents was the new quar-

terback at Brunswick High. The Brunswick High Pirates' football program started winning football games consecutively for the first time in recent years; the chief reason for the victories was the new quarterback. This sophomore was nothing short of phenomenal and was the talk of the town. He was lauded by seemingly everyone with the exception of the young man whom he replaced. The accolades and victories continued to mount as the Brunswick High Pirates' 1977 football season progressed. At the yearly sports' banquet, the young man was voted the team's Most Valuable Player. However, shortly thereafter, the promising young star was taken to a mental hospital for an evaluation. When he returned home, he was only a shell of the vibrant person he once was, never capable of leading his team to victory again. It was suggested that his stay at the hospital did him more harm than good. Even more tragic, this young man could no longer function enough to provide for himself. Needless to say, everyone in Abbott Andrews Terrace and "Pirate Country" was both shocked and saddened over these sudden and strange turn of events.

Was the young phenom's sudden misfortune the result of his sustaining too many concussions? No. Did he suffer from any other previous mental malady? No. Was his sudden change the results of drug abuse? No. The young man's only love was sports; he did not hang out with the "wrong crowd." The young man and the author grew up in the same neighborhood. All who knew the young man knew that he was as normal as any other healthy young man.

Then a rumor started circulating concerning the young man who lost his starting quarterback position to the promising rising star. The rumor stated that the replaced quarterback, motivated by jealousy, spiked the drink of the young man at the annual sports' banquet with a hallucinatory, illegal drug. Though the rumor was never substantiated, it is incomprehensible that one human being could be so malicious as to inflict such pain on a fellow human being. If true, the young man who was replaced as starting quarterback was motivated by selfish pride. The saddest part of this tragedy is the treatment this innocent victim now receives. Many of those who once sang his praises now view him as some type of a *nuisance*—an outcast. Mankind is so very superficial at times.

More than likely, we all have seen individuals who suffer from legitimate mental disorders and should be living in a suitable institution

for their and the public's safety. For the most part, these individuals are social outcasts. They make no effort to fit into normal society. Dear reader, have you ever encountered a person who may live on the streets and who obviously suffers from some form of a mental disorder? We have probably thought to ourselves: "I wonder what happened in his life to result in this sad state of affairs?" Some of these individuals were once thriving, contributing citizens who could no longer take the pressures of the "daily grind," others are still suffering the effects of war, some suffer from the effects of drug abuse, while some have been diagnosed with legitimate mental disorders brought on by chemical imbalances.

In this writer's adopted hometown of Macon, Georgia, there are several individuals who come to his mind. First, there is the man who is almost always situated at the south end of the Otis Redding Bridge every morning *preaching* to the cars as they pass. The man's appearance is, sadly, very deplorable. Second, there is the woman who walks up and down multiple streets pushing a shopping cart. She has been seen from time to time sweeping the sidewalks or a portion of a street for no apparent reason. Third, there is the *walking man*; he can be seen walking aimlessly all over town at various times of the day and night. He is reported to have been at one time a very notable athlete. Last, there is the *umbrella lady*; she can be seen in various places in town (never without her umbrella) talking to herself. It is reported that she once taught at the local university but suffered a nervous breakdown. What type of society are we if we do not provide the necessary care for those who suffer from substantiated mental illnesses? Let us not forget that Nebuchadnezzar's mental disorder was the result of his arrogant disobedience.

THE HUMILITY OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

After being forced to live as a social outcast who suffered from mental madness for "seven times," God's mercy allowed Nebuchadnezzar's sense of reason to return to him. His praise of God is one of the greatest declarations in all of Scripture (Dan. 4:34-37). Undoubtedly, there is evidence of the monarch's being converted, though it is not explicitly stated. Those who subscribe to the damnable doctrine of *Predestination* or *Irresistible Grace* would argue that the Lord "singled out" the Babylonian king because "God had chosen him throughout all eternity to be saved." Such a position, of course, is fatally flawed and

ignores what other verses clearly teach through explicit and implied statements. First, all men who ever lived have a Divine purpose for which to live (Ecc. 12:13). Second, according to Romans 1:18-32, all men who lived before the Gospel age were subject to God and had a chance to be in an approved covenant relationship with Jehovah. Jonah and his dealings with the Ninevites show that Gentiles can be in an approved relationship with Him by their proper response to Jonah's preaching. In another instance, Exodus 4, 7-10, and 14 teach that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh—one cannot take these statements and reject what other verses straightforwardly declare about the choices Pharaoh personally made. We must conclude that God through His omnipotence punished the conceited Nebuchadnezzar for his sins; yet, He did not take away his power of volition.

Notwithstanding, another may argue: "God used the miraculous as a means to reach this sinner; He intervened in his daily affairs. Nebuchadnezzar had to be predestined to become a believer in Jehovah; he simply needed some 'Divine intervention.'" The answer is that Nebuchadnezzar had already witnessed firsthand the awesome might of the Almighty by means of more than one miracle and was not yet converted. Since miracles were still in existence at that time, God used one of His wondrous methods—dreams—of reaching the Babylonian king. Nineveh, on the other hand, was converted without miraculous intervention. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar was allowed to see into the future, but it did not influence him to turn from his evil ways. If the grace of God is as irresistible, as maintained by Calvinism, why did God go to such extremes to *reel in* one of the *chosen ones*? Could He not have just overpowered Nebuchadnezzar's thoughts and made the king serve Him? Conclusively, God did not force Nebuchadnezzar to follow Him. Nebuchadnezzar finally realized that he was not dealing with an *ordinary* God.

This preacher is not denying the fact that some have turned to Jehovah after experiencing some difficult times in their lives. There is nothing new under the sun; suffering and trials are a part of the human experience. Saints and sinners suffer alike. With some, suffering reminds them that they are incapable of controlling every aspect of their life, and thus they acknowledge the need for God's guidance in their lives. With others, trials lead them to search out the true meaning of life. Acts 17:24-28 and Hebrews 11:6 apply to those in this situation.

Quite the reverse, suffering may “push some away” from God. Ted Turner, renowned billionaire and businessman, once considered going to a seminary to become a denominational minister. However, when his *prayers* concerning his sister went unanswered, he denounced his belief in God. Now he regularly attacks organized religion as a “crutch” for those who cannot make it in the real world.

After considering his wicked ways, Nebuchadnezzar’s heart changed, which is the **root** of repentance. As a result of his humbling himself before the Almighty: (1) he **regained** his sense of **reason**, (2) his kingdom was fully **restored** to him, (3) his officials and servants once again **resorted** to him, and (4) he **rejoiced** in the Lord on a continuous basis.

Without question, humility is one of the choicest traits a person can possess. Moses asked Pharaoh: “Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?” (Exo. 10:3). Humility is a prerequisite to answered prayers and plentiful blessings (2 Chr. 7:14). One of the purposes of the wilderness wandering was to humble the Israelites (Deu. 8:1-3). As with Nebuchadnezzar, Manasseh, after suffering much because of his atrocities, repented of his multiple errors (2 Chr. 33:11-19). The Scriptures reveal that Manasseh “humbled himself greatly” (33:12). After hearing God’s pronouncement of doom, abhorrent Ahab—who “did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kin. 21:25)—humbled himself, (howbeit briefly) before God (1 Kin. 21:27-29). The supreme example, Christ Jesus, “humbled himself” (Phi. 2:8). Therefore, we must clothe ourselves in humility; then, and only then, will the Lord exalt us (Luke 14:11; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

THE HIGHER POWERS AND JEHOVAH

That all nations that have ever existed were/are subject to Jehovah is undisputable. How incontrovertible and instructive is Daniel’s affirmation of praise of God regarding His sovereignty over all nations: “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Dan. 2:20-21). Even the “accuser of the brethren” acknowledges this irrefutable fact (Luke 4:5-6). Satan possesses power, but not absolute power, over the kingdoms of the world; this power was *delivered* or *granted* to him. Nonetheless, he is very much subject to the Almighty—and shall ever be (Job 1-2). Al Brown, com-

menting on the Lord's confrontation with the devil, provides more insight into this matter:

The scriptures state that Satan is the lord of this world. John writes that "the whole world lieth in the evil one." (1 John 5:19). Jesus was aware that this one beside him was no less than the "prince of the powers of the air" (Eph. 2:1-3). Christians "wrestle...the world-rulers of this darkness" (Eph. 6:12). He also is called "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) (107).

Those who possess *spiritual vision* can see the devil's influence and *fingerprints* on the rampant corruption that exists in governments today.

At the charge of the Almighty, nations came from the family of Noah after the worldwide deluge (Gen. 9:1; 10:32). When the descendants of Noah became "too big for their britches," God reminded them that He knows all, sees all, and controls all (Gen. 11:1-9). God's promise to Abram included a nation whose government would be theocratic—ruled by God—in nature (Gen. 12:2). Never had there been a nation like the one promised to faithful Abram who would later be named Abraham—the father of many nations. Its King would be able to provide for and to defend it perfectly. Its constitution would be perfect in nature, ensuring that all of its citizens would be treated justly. Its prosperity would be unrivaled. It was to serve as an illustration of righteousness and offer the invitation for others to seek Jehovah. Most importantly, it was chosen as the conduit through which would come the King of kings. How true are the words of the psalmist: "Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD; *and* the people *whom* he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Psa. 33:12). How tragic it was that most of the Israelites viewed the privilege of being God's chosen people as a *burden*, ignoring the words of the wise man: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people" (Pro. 14:34). For this reason, Jehovah punished the Jews, using as instruments wicked nations, showing He is Ruler of all nations that have ever existed (2 Kin. 17; Jer. 22).

When the Almighty commissioned the reluctant, stubborn Jonah to preach a message of repentance to the inhabitants of the Nineveh (the capital of the Assyrian Empire), the evidence is conclusive that the Gentile nations too were subject to the Mighty God.

The prophecies of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc., were all fulfilled in Christ. Jehovah used different kingdoms or nations to accomplish His plans (Dan. 2, 5, 7-8). Paul teaches: "But when the ful-

ness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4) Jesus came upon the scene at the exact time prescribed by God: “And in the days of these kings [Romans] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom” (Dan. 2:44). He lived and died as a faithful Jew—Jews were at that time, for the most part, second-class citizens living under Roman oppression. In reality, Roman laws did not protect most Jews. Why would God choose to send Christ at a time that seemed to be unprofitable for His chosen people? It shows that God is always in control; His power and providence allow His plans to prevail in spite of the obstacles or challenges present. F. W. Mattox makes these observations about the Roman government’s contribution to the spread of Christ’s kingdom and Gospel.

The presence of the occupation soldiers with the accompanying tax collectors ever reminded the Jews that they were a subject people....

There were obvious benefits, however, from a powerful central government even to a subject people, and many conditions worked together to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah and make possible the rapid spread of the Gospel to all the world.

At the conclusion of the civil wars, Augustus obtained through the senate autocratic power and restored peace to the Empire.... Such a period of peace was essential for the effective spread of the Gospel.

The opening of the world to trade and travel was another benefit conferred by the empire. Never before in the history of the world had the nations been brought so near to each other. Not only was there universal law, there was also a unity of mankind that had not been known before. Having a common coinage and being encouraged by widely a extended system of free trade, commerce flourished. Excellent roads were built and never until our own generation has travel been so easy or so frequent (20-21).

Mattox also remarks on the moral climate of the Roman Empire during the time in which the Christ lived.

The idea of life being sacred in itself was quite foreign to the Roman mind. Abortion was not discouraged by law and was very extensively practiced. It was apparently well understood and a regular part of the physician’s practice. The destruction of a newborn infant was common. A sickly or deformed child was drowned at birth, and the fate of the normal child was solely in the hands of the father. The exposure of girl babies was common enough that there were professionals who gathered them up and reared them until they could be sold into slavery.

Suicide was considered an open door through which a man might escape the woes of life at any time and that he had a perfect right to avail himself of it...

This may explain somewhat the lack of abhorrence felt concerning the tremendous loss of life suffered in the gladiatorial combats in the name of sport. At Rome one of the main amusements was the spectacle of human bloodshed.... It took the moral power of the Gospel of Christ to check such inhumanity. After hearing the ideals of the Christ, the contrast was so great that many immediately recognized a fulfillment of inward desires for a better day, and accepted the new faith (23).

Acts 17:26 contains a plethora of information concerning the omnipotence of God, and, is one of the most profound verses of Scripture in Holy Writ: **“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.”** It, like Daniel 4:17, teaches unequivocally that God rules in the affairs of men and nations. H. Leo Boles made these comments in reference to the above verse:

God created Adam and then formed Eve, and from this one pair has come all the nations of earth. The nations and races of men have a common origin; God made them all, and hence is their creator. The Greeks, like the Jews, thought themselves of finer nature, a superior race in origin, character and destiny. Paul instructs them of the brotherhood of man; this was indeed strange to Greek ears; they had an idea of different origins, different gods, different religions for different nations. Paul thus starts to reason with them about one God, Creator of all, and deduces from it one religion, one origin for all, one brotherhood, one salvation for the race. God had fixed the limits of their territory as he had determined the duration of their existence. It was God who had given their seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter; he had ordained seedtime and harvest and prepared the earth for man's habitation (281).

Another commentator presents this view regarding the above point made in Paul's Mars' Hill discourse:

The gods of the Greeks were distant beings who had no concern for the problems and needs of men. But the God of creation is also the God of history and geography ... The Greeks felt they were a special race, different from other nations; but Paul affirmed otherwise. Even their precious land that they revered came as a gift from God. It is not the power of man, but the government of God, that determines the rise and fall of nations (Dan. 4:35) (Wiersbe 473).

We should never think of governments as lifeless entities; they are made up of people who must give an account to God for their actions. Therefore, the government serves a Divine purpose (Rom. 13). Providing educational opportunities, health care, good roads, recreational facilities, strong military, etc., are subordinate responsibilities a government can address. However, the ultimate purpose of government is to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. Government's ultimate purpose is to keep the peace through laws that are beneficial for all of its citizenry. Hence, when a government leaves its ordained purpose, it is destined to fall.

THE HIGHER POWERS AND THE CHRISTIAN

Does God endorse one form of government over another? The author does not possess enough intellect to answer such a complex question. China, Cuba, and North Korea serve under the communist banner, which insists that Jehovah does not exist. Multiple countries in the Middle East are governments deeply rooted in the pernicious Koran. Still, others are dedicated to socialism, which stems from communism. Yes, there are voices in America crying out for the United States to adopt more social programs. Kings, sultans, monarchs, or dictators govern some countries. Likewise there are the democratic governments. "And to the **republic** for which it stands" is often ignored by so many in our beloved country yet it is another form of government. Conclusively, all forms of governments are subject to God.

There are Christians living under each style of government referred to in the above paragraph. How should a Christian live under a government that is anti-God in nature or very strict on the issue of freedom of religion? Each Christian should take note of the ultimate example, the Christ. Jesus, though living under what would be considered less than ideal circumstances, still honored the king to whom He was subject (Mat. 5:41; 22:15-22). He never advocated anarchy. As evidenced by the Lord's birth, infamous trials, and crucifixion, for the most part ruthless, murderous men ruled the government to which He was subject (Mat. 2; 26-27). In spite of the maltreatment to which many Jews were subject (Acts 12; 18), God's command to His people was/is: "Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17). Too, we are commanded to respect and pray for our rulers: "For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

One who has respect for the Word of God can see God's providence in allowing America to be established—a nation that allows men to practice their religious faith with very few restrictions. The “founding fathers” relied heavily on God's Word for guidance when framing the United States Constitution. Through its history, many American citizens did not follow Matthew 7:12 in regards to treatment of some of their fellow human beings. Racial tensions still run high in America because of the issues of slavery and civil rights. Only the church has the authority and power to quell the sensitive issue of racism (Eph. 2). Through Christ, the holy nation of God (the church) is the bridge of racial harmony. The holy nation of God was established when the One with perfect insight knew the time was right (1 Pet. 2:9). Its mission and might are unmatched; its body of law has no equal; its influence is uniquely unprecedented.

Freedom of speech and religion are just two of the many freedoms we Americans enjoy. Through the years, many inventions have been created (Internet, television, radio, airplane, etc.) from the minds of Americans and have benefitted all nations. More importantly, these inventions have assisted the church in worldwide evangelism. With the advent of technology, brethren are now able to teach from their living room a man living on the other side of the world.

America, like so many nations before her, is destined for self-destruction because of her ever-increasing, anti-God policies that are promoted predominantly by the party of “inclusion” and those who insist that God does not exist. Thankfully, there are voices of opposition contending against the rhetoric of those whose policies are not in synch with God's Word. These individuals are trying to utilize godly principles to turn around this country before it is too late.

Although America is moving farther away from her professed roots as a God-fearing nation, this preacher honestly believes that he is blessed beyond measure to be born into what is probably the greatest nation ever to exist in the history of mankind. He believes that this country has been spared the fullness of God's wrath because there are enough righteous souls who make up part of its population.

The author served proudly and honorably in the United States Air Force for nearly ten years. He, like all military personnel, was subject to the **Uniform Code of Military Justice**. The UCMJ is far stricter than the American Constitution. It promotes a system of structure and

respect; it does not allow for insubordination; it does not endorse homosexuality; it forbids adultery; it requires its subjects to live honorably at all times; it punishes treasonous activities. If all Americans were subject to the UCMJ, many of the ills that plague this country would rapidly dissipate. The major flaw with the UCMJ is its priority list—country, God, family. God does not *ride in the passenger seat*, nor is He anyone's "co-pilot."

As this writer is penning his manuscript, he is cognizant of the constant political campaigns of varied individuals vying to become the next president of the United States of America—the world's lone "super power." Far too often it is the case that these candidates promise to have **all** the answers to **all** that plagues **all** Americans. Some of these candidates were groomed "from the womb"—attending the most prestigious schools and becoming members of the most influential organizations as a part of the preparatory process—to become career politicians, serving not their constituents' best interests, but the desires of special interest groups or the highest bidder. Others are seeking the glory, praise, and power associated with holding a position of public office. Far too many of these politicians partner with the "secular progressives," who would have all references and reminders of God removed from our public facilities and displays. Those politicians who truly believe in God and that He should govern America are not well received by those in the "mainstream."

Brethren living in America should first be Christians, then Americans. We should neither be Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, nor a member of the Green Party, etc. We are Christians first and foremost. We should as responsible citizens exercise our privilege to vote; sometimes, we can influence change through the voting process. However, our greatest weapons are prayer, persistence, and providence. We should and must be responsible citizens. When we vote, we must study the candidate we are considering in light of what the Bible teaches. The candidate's stand on moral and law issues such as abortion, marriage, assisted suicide or euthanasia, welfare, unwed pregnancies, crime, homosexuality, welfare, immigration, gambling, etc., must be considered. One is **extremely** naïve or negligent, if he thinks the Lord will not hold him accountable for the votes he cast.

Amazingly, there are some brethren who propagate the premise that a Christian's faith and politics are two separate matters. Some brethren

insist that God ordained the church, not government, to address matters concerning morality. They argue government serves a secular function, not spiritual. Therefore, when they vote, they do not have to concern themselves with the politician's "personal beliefs." They, too, argue that a Christian should not allow his personal beliefs to influence his choice when considering a political candidate—the secularist's manifesto.

Brothers such as the ones under discussion sometimes argue against the God-ordained death penalty as commanded in Romans 13:3-4. In response to such *reasoning*, is not murder addressed throughout the Scriptures? Has not Jehovah always condemned murder? Is not abortion murder? Can we stand before God innocent when we knowingly support one who has reduced this atrocity to "a matter of choice"? Will not God hold those responsible who argued in favor of and support *Roe V. Wade*?

CONCLUSION

Through Nebuchadnezzar's experience we Bible students can glean much information and wisdom to keep us on *the straight and narrow* path. We who love the Book Divine must accept our roles as citizens first of the Lord's kingdom then of the United States of America. Let us be persuaded as well to leave the Lord's work to the Lord when it comes to dealing with corrupt governments and/or politicians. The Revelation of John should remind us that God will punish those who, with assistance from the wicked one, persecute the beloved church of Christ and enact laws that are anti-God in nature. When unjustly mistreated by government officials, Paul and Silas did not forget the Great Commission (Acts 16), neither can we. As Roman citizens, they could have stayed in Philippi to fight for their civil rights that were grossly violated. Nevertheless, they respected God's commands: "Recompense to no man evil for evil.... Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:17-19). When beneficial to spreading the Gospel, Paul utilized his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:24-29; 25:10-12). We who possess similar liberties must likewise utilize them for the Cause of Christ.

In all things, we must ever remember and respect Christ's role in this matter: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat. 28:18). Those who refuse to be subject to Christ the Lord will one day

bow the knee and confess Him as King of kings and Lord of lords (Phi. 2:10-11).

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THE WRITING ON THE WALL

DANIEL 5

Wayne Blake

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel is a favorite from the youngest to the oldest of readers. Many of us can recall by memory his stay in the lions' den or his ability, through God, to interpret dreams. Chapter 1 introduces us to a young boy who was committed not to defile himself with the food and influence of his captors. Chapter 2 records the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar prophesying the rise and fall of the four world empires. The same chapter foretells of the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego face the trial by fire in chapter 3. The second dream of Nebuchadnezzar confirming that the God of the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men is recorded in chapter 4. We now come to Daniel 5, where we find an incident familiar to many: The Handwriting on the Wall. As with any Old Testament account, written for our admonition and learning (1 Cor. 10:11), there are great lessons to learn that apply to us today.

Because of the length of the context, we will not quote all the passages in this manuscript, but all references will be made and some passages will be quoted in their entirety.

COMMENTARY OF DANIEL 5:1-31

Alcohol and Idolatry in the King's Court (5:1-4)

The time is around 539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar died and was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach (2 Kin. 25:27). After two years, he was assassinated by Nergilissar, his brother-in-law. Nergilissar died four

years later (556 B.C.), leaving the throne to his infant son, Labashi-Marduk. Labashi-Marduk was later deposed by a priestly revolution.

Nabonidus, a former priest under Nebuchadnezzar, was made king in 556 B.C. He was more interested in scholarly and religious pursuits. He appointed his son Belshazzar as ruler of Babylon in his place. Belshazzar became co-regent in 550 B.C. He was *second* in command. This might explain why he only offered Daniel the *third* position in the kingdom (Dan. 5:16, 29). Nebuchadnezzar is called his “father” and possibly could have been the father-in-law of Nabonidus (Belshazzar’s father). It was common to refer to one’s ancestor as *father*. Belshazzar throws a big feast and has taken the gold and silver vessels from the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 36:10). He adds insult to injury by using them in the feast. The king and his guests foolishly praised the creation rather than the Creator.

The Writing on the Wall (5:5-9)

The fingers of a man’s hands appear and write on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace. Belshazzar sees the part of the hand that wrote. In the case of the king, one moment he is puffed up with pride and the next his knees are knocking! All he saw was a man’s hand! Once again, the king appeals to his advisers and none can read nor interpret the words upon the wall, just like before with Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2, 4).

The Arrival of God’s Man (5:10-16)

The queen was not at the banquet, yet she gave the greatest advice above all those who were present during the sighting of the hand. She tells him to call Daniel. Twice the king says, “I have heard of you,” yet it seems only by reputation did he know the prophet. He evidently had not made much effort to know Daniel prior to this event. God’s man was here, and yet the words he will interpret are not going to be those the king wants to hear.

The Indictment Against the King (5:17-24)

Daniel is offered a king’s ransom to interpret the words on the wall. He rejects the king’s reward—his character shining through. He willingly tells the truth for free as he recounts Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream. History teaches much, yet so many are not willing to learn from it. Daniel then rebukes the king for not learning from his father’s expe-

rience. Belshazzar exalted himself when he should have glorified God. Now a message was being sent to him from God.

The Sentence and Execution (5:25-31)

The handwriting on the wall explained by Daniel was a hard message: “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.” *Mene* means, “God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it.” *Tekel* means, “You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.” *Peres (Upharsin)* means, “Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians.” Belshazzar is true to his promise and offers Daniel a third of his kingdom—a third of nothing. His soul this night would be required of him. He is dead by morning, and the kingdom is taken from his hands.

This is a short overview of the chapter. The lessons to be drawn from such are immense. We will look at the lessons of pride, abuse of the things sanctified by God, the words of God regarding our lives today, and the harsh—yet just—judgment of God.

APPLICATION

The life the Christian lives is to be modeled after the life of Jesus while He was upon this earth (1 John 2:3ff). The life of Belshazzar is an example to this very day that provides the Christian with a warning: we serve a jealous God, and He will not support us when we choose to do those things that do not benefit the service and example we are to be before the world. The following are some examples we must be careful of today.

Alcohol Will Cause One to Make Wrong Decisions

Who, with honesty of heart, does not understand and believe this statement? There are deacons, elders, and other members of the Lord’s church who try to rationalize social drinking. I once had someone tell me that by going to bars they were setting the right example by not drinking, and they might be able to talk to someone about God. Rationalization will cause one to believe and state some pretty ignorant things.

One of the sugar sticks of the drinker is John 2. Here we have the wedding feast where Jesus made *wine*. They will use this passage to *prove* that even Jesus condones the drinking of alcohol. But just a casual, honest look at *wine* in a Greek lexicon or dictionary will yield that *wine* refers to the vine the grapes are on as well as the drinking of the unfermented juice of grapes. The context has to dictate the usage

of the word. In each case where intoxicating wine is mentioned, there is an admonition to **not** drink it—except in the case of medicinal needs (1 Tim. 5:23). If John 2 is the *proof* that Jesus made alcoholic wine, then one must understand that Jesus sinned. In Habakkuk 2:15 it reads: “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to *him*, and maketh *him* drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!” Jesus—being a Jew—was under the old Law; therefore, it would have been sin for Him to offer alcoholic wine to the wedding guests. The Bible is clear, Jesus was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

The Christian is to be separate and apart from the world. Our influence should be of purity and Christ-like in all avenues. Who would dare say that drinking of alcohol is the way to be a good example? The world is caught up in social drinking, bars, parties, and Mardi Gras. One only needs to watch the news or hear talk around the office to understand that these activities are ungodly.

Idolatry

We see the word *idolatry*, and we conjure in our minds little statues that people would bow down before. They are included, but they are not the only idols we deal with. Super Bowl Sunday is one idol of our world. Sadly, our own brethren are bowing before this one as well. There are liberal congregations across the brotherhood that will postpone or cancel services on the evening of the big game. Some congregations hold Super Bowl parties at the building, with worship either during intermission of the game or before the game. The excuse (because it is not a reason) is that many are not going to attend on that night anyway, so this is a way to bring them on out or make it easier for all of us to enjoy a fellowship time together. I do not think the “love feasts” mentioned in the Bible were quite like this, although they were abused just like this fellowship that was addressed by Paul (1 Cor. 11:17ff).

Jesus warned His disciples that “ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). Some today would say: “Well, I have no idols that I bow down to,” but I would say that some do. How many of our once faithful elders, deacons, Gospel preachers are now worshipping the idol of “Family”? Family you say? Yes! Many of our brethren once stood firm on issues of adultery, fornication, fellowship, mixed swimming, cheer-leading, but now their children’s lives and choices have led them away from plain Bible teaching regarding these issues. Jesus said:

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! 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 12:49-53).

How could any, who are faithful to God, not understand that sometimes our family members are not going to do the right thing, and ultimately, some will be lost to a devil's hell. It is sad, it is not something we speak about, it is something we do not want to think about; but being a Christian takes commitment—a counting of the cost (14:28).

Pride

There are hundreds of examples and passages of Scripture dealing with the problem of pride. Belshazzar threw a banquet to commend himself as important and invited his friends to be part of his celebration. He showed neither respect for God nor the things of God in regards to the temple. He was wanting to show his friends that he was something of a great man, yet in the eyes of God he was found wanting.

“Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18). “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (29:23). How many times do we see these general truths shown to be the absolute truth? There are preachers, elders, deacons, and leaders in the church who over time, because of the reliance the brethren have upon them, begin to believe their own greatness. There are some who are the *go-to* men regarding information and understanding in regards to problems within a congregation. They are asked time and time again to answer questions, give explanations, and help with guidance; people heap praise and adoration upon them. Then in time these men seem to fall away from the faith because they are now full of pride and arrogance. They sin, give wrong advice, and when they are called into question, they try to destroy those who would call this to their attention. Jesus said: “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!” (Luke 6:26).

Naaman was such a man with a pride problem regarding his cure for the leprosy that was ravaging his body (2 Kin. 5). He wanted to be healed and heard about a man of God. When Naaman arrived at

the prophet's house, Elisha sent a servant to give him the cure for this leprosy. What did Naaman do? He got upset; he was a powerful man, able to command men to go here and there. Who was this prophet to send a servant with words and not show up himself? After a one of his servants reminded him of what was important, he did as commanded and was healed.

The Pharisee who came to pray was full of pride (Luke 18:10-14). The publican would not so much as lift his head when he prayed to God. The Pharisee was just glad he was not like the publican. The publican understood his plight and realized he was in need of the grace of God and His forgiveness. The Pharisee was always willing to brag a bit about how righteous he was and how close he was to God's favor, yet he was the most vile and unrighteous of the two. Pride can make man feel more important regarding his life and his good works. The man who built the barn was later called to give his life because he was so prideful in his accomplishments (12:20)

There must be a realization that no matter who we are we can fall to sin and pride. It can and will get to even the *best* of us if we do not remember to be humble and follow Jesus' example of being a servant and not a master.

The Things of God Cannot Be Used as Common

Belshazzar took the emblems from the temple and used them to drink alcohol and for other acts of lasciviousness. In Exodus 27, God commanded these items to be set aside for the worship that was to be done in the tabernacle. God called them *chosen vessels* and therefore they were to be handled and honored in a way that was revered—not in a common way.

One of those things that is especially on my mind lately is the taking of the **songs** we use for worship to God and use them outside the worship for a common form of entertainment. I love Bluegrass music and true Country and Western music, but it never fails, there will be a singer or a band who wants to play *The Old Rugged Cross*, *Rock of Ages*, or *I'll Fly Away* with instrumental accompaniment. Those are songs that bring tears to my eyes and bring my thoughts to God and how He has blessed the world and His children. But those songs are songs we sing in worship, with an understanding that they are not to be sung with musical instruments, and yet some have no problem outside the assembly to do so. The Scriptures are clear regarding the use of

these songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The life of the Christian does not start when he walks in the door of the church building and end when he walks out. A Christian is a Christian from the moment of true obedience of the Gospel till his physical death.

Fellowship

Fellowship is exclusive, and yet we see that is another privilege taken for granted and extended to people of the world and even brethren who are erring. The brethren are this very day being challenged to withdraw fellowship from those in sin. Yet, we look around and our brethren are fellowshiping men like Dave Miller, Memphis School Of Preaching, Florida School Of Preaching, Apologetics Press, Southwest School of Biblical Studies, Southwest Church of Christ (Austin, TX), Schertz Church of Christ (Schertz, TX), and the list goes on and on. The lines of fellowship are so clear in Scripture! Ephesians 5:11 tells us plainly to “have **no** fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.” John commands us not to extend fellowship to any who go beyond the Word of God to the point of not even giving them our approval or support, or we are a partaker in their deeds (2 John 9-11). There was a time when our brethren understood these passages that dealt with fellowship and the limits of it (1 The. 3:6ff; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 John 1:3ff; 1 Cor. 5:1ff).

The Home

The home was established by God with guidelines that one must follow to be pleasing to God. Yet the home is being devastated by our government, the acceptance of homosexuality, single-parent homes, and general worldly individuals who have no business being married or parents. The Scriptures say, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it...children *are* an heritage of the LORD (Psa. 127:1, 3). The children are a blessing to us; they are not to be abused, left on side of the highway in a car seat, or mutilated and thrown out into the Gulf of Mexico.

Not long ago it was a shame that a woman would raise a child on her own when the father was alive. Divorces and the lax attitude of parents have caused a fast slide in society. Children ten and older want to have a baby so they can raise it like they would a puppy. We all know that puppies are fun to play with but not so fun to care for, and often mom ends up having to feed and clean up after it. Likewise, these children are

being left behind for a grandparent to raise while *mom* goes out to live her life with no regard for the child being left behind. The onslaught of godless people has brought to our children harmful practices, such as the teaching of sex education to even the kindergartners. Discipline has become abuse, and love has become tolerance of sin. The home is in need of godly parents and godly children.

Like Belshazzar, one day we all will see the hand of God: are we going to be ready? When Belshazzar saw the hand of God, he was so afraid that his knees shook. It would be almost funny if it were not so sad. I often wonder what he would do if the face of God had been revealed to him. How would we react if God were revealed to us in this manner? There will be a day that we will be judged by the things we have done in this body (2 Cor. 5:10). The atheist will be humbled because even he will look upon Jesus and know that there is a God (Rev. 1:7). The Scriptures teach that every knee shall bow (Rom. 14:12). What fear! What motivation! Yet there are men every day in word or practice who show they do not believe in God. There are those who say they want Jesus as their Savior but not as their Lord. They do not want to be submissive. They do not want to obey. Give me the man and not the plan is the mind-set.

The Words People Use Today

Common euphemisms do nothing but hide what is truly in the heart of so many. When *gosh*, *gee*, *geez*, *dang*, *goodness gracious*, along with many others flow from our lips, we show that we have no true understanding of the words we use and the impact it has upon those who profess to be Christians. It is time for all of us to change the way we use words and understand that words do mean something.

King Agrippa was asked one question: “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest” (Acts 26:27). He understood but was not willing to commit to the truth. Felix “trembled” at the hearing of the Gospel (24:25). The rich young ruler was given a choice: give all that you have to the poor and follow Christ, or keep it and be lost. He chose the latter (Mat. 19:16-22). Each of these men were told the truth, and all rejected it to their own detriment.

In the early days of the church, the truth was taught with no apologies. Today, such is not the case. There is a trend that began a few decades ago that said preaching needed to be toned down and not be so “mean-spirited.” (Does this sound like political *correctness*?) How

many Gospel preachers could be elected to office? I dare say that people may think they want plain-speaking people to lead them, but our country does not remember that it has people in their very own neighborhoods speaking plainly, and they refuse to listen to them. I have had people say to me that they are so impressed that I use so much Scripture in sermons and that I am willing to just “tell it like it is,” but people are bored with the Bible; there is not the fear or the respect that there once was. The days where people would stand when the Bible was read, where people would be so quiet and listen to the preaching of the Word of God. In most people’s world, they fear their bosses, the police, and even their wives more than the “hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

When I read of the statement made by Belshazzar: “I have heard of you,” I thought of Elijah. Elijah was the one who was charged with troubling Israel (1 Kin. 18:17). There were men like Elisha, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, and the list goes on of godly men who were not going to do anything but preach the Word of God. They told people not what they wanted to hear but what they needed to hear. They endured death threats, stoning, beatings, and jail, yet they continued to preach what people needed. We need men today (supported by their wives) to stand and preach what people need because the world is getting farther and farther from God. One only needs to write articles for the local paper to find that they can be hated to the point of violence because they preach against the moral sins of the day or there is only one true church or obedience must be to the Bible alone. Religious people are merely tolerated by most; they are denounced and made fun of on television and movies. When I see the way they portray people of faith, it really does show that people do not fear God, nor do they want to be told what they need to hear. They were to obey “all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word” (Jer. 26:2).

I think of the modern day *Elijahs*, and the same is being said of them also. They are the ones who trouble the brotherhood, not the sin of which some will not repent. Brotherhood papers are being shunned because they dare point out the sins of some. Men like Ira Y. Rice, Jr., David Brown, Michael Hatcher, Lynn Parker, Dub McClish, and other **faithful Gospel preachers** are drug through the mud each day because our brethren will not give up their sin and sinful fellowship, because they have forgotten history:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall throughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand as a grapegatherer into the baskets. 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.... 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. 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. 6:9-10, 15-16).

The people of our day are able to get information within seconds of it happening. They are able to drive, fly, e-mail, web-cam their face to someone else in some foreign country with nothing more than a cable, satellite, or modem. Yet there are many not willing to listen to the modern *Elijahs* that will be condemned just like those who would not hearken to Elijah in his day.

CONCLUSION

The battles we face are not new—some might be new to **us**—but they are not new in regards to the history of the church. We need to remember, we will be saved by our works and hearts being in tune with God—not our fellow man alone. Some need to learn this lesson before it is too late.

Daniel was written hundreds of years ago, yet the lessons from this book are so needed today. We must be willing to do things God's way or we will be told on the day of judgment: “depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mat. 7:23). The stunning part of this verse is that Jesus said no matter how much *good* they might have done, he **never** knew them, which is such a chilling thought as we go through this life realizing that we must not only listen to the word of God, but we must also obey it (Mat. 7:21).

WORK CITED

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