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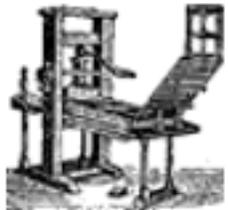
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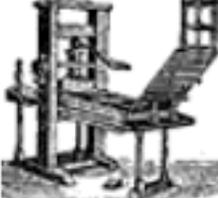
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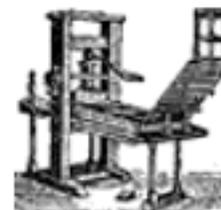
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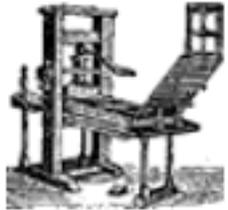
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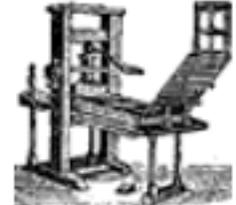
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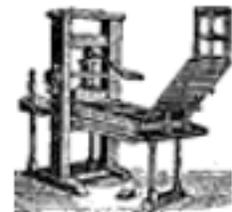


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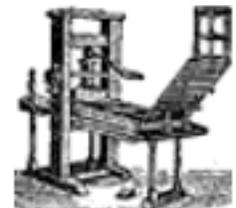
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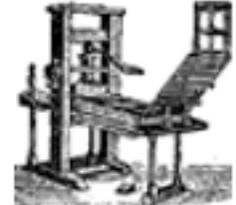


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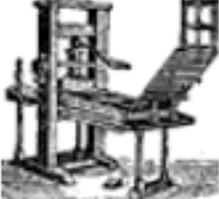
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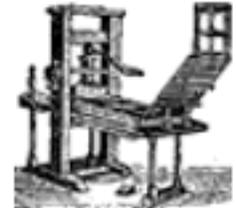


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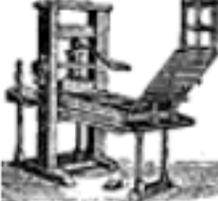
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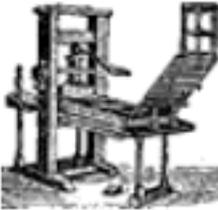
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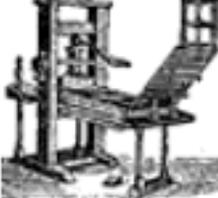
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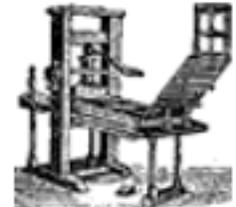


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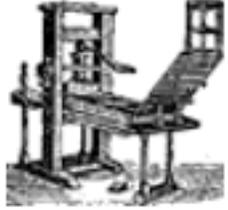
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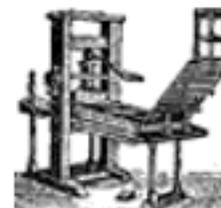


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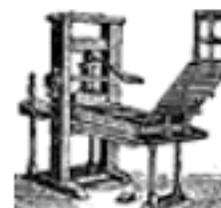


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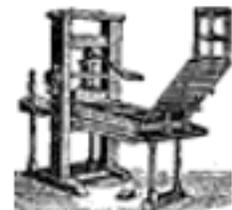


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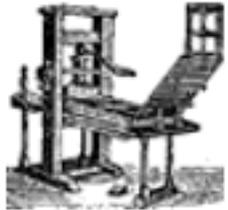


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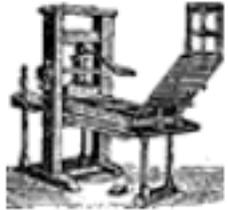
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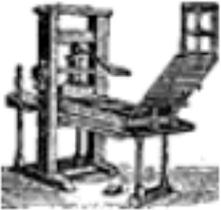
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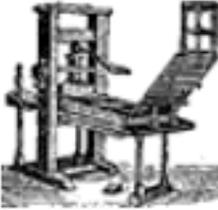
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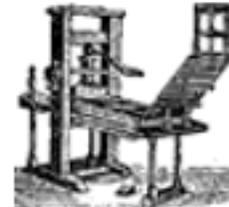


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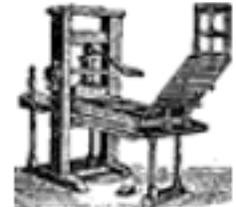
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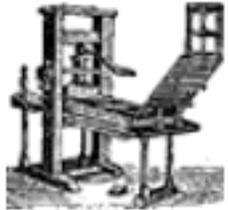
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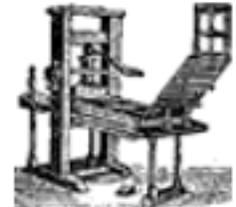
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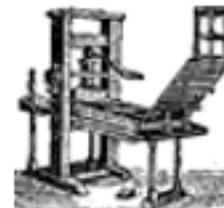


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A Commentary on Galatians 6:1-10

Galatians 6:1-10

Galatians 6:10 is the culmination of a line of thought begun in chapter five: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (v. 13). Then in verse 16, he continues: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." The following verses draw a contrast between the flesh and the Spirit and their works and fruit. Then in verses 24 & 25, Paul warns: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

But a question would naturally arise in the minds of the brethren, which Paul anticipates and answers in the first paragraph of chapter six. It might be worded something like this: "What about those Christians who are weak and give in to following the flesh? Should we turn away from them and reject them?" Let us look at Paul's answer. I am making a few comments in parentheses as we read these verses.

Verse 1 - "Brethren, even if a man (this is the Christian man) is caught in any trespass (he is overtaken in a fault, he is walking after the flesh, he needs to be restored), you who are spiritual (the obligation is not placed on the church--the case is not assumed to have progressed that far--but it is to those walking after the Spirit), restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted (to turn aside after the flesh)."

The apostle sets the stage in this first verse for the subject of burden bearing. Someone is overtaken or overcome in a fault or sin. The subject is not overcome with hunger or exposure to the weather, but rather to sin. This becomes even more obvious in the end of the verse when Paul warns the restorer to be careful for he might "also be tempted." The fault of the one needing restoration is the result of temptation, not physical needs.

Verse 2 - "Bear one another's burdens (this sets forth the individual nature of the repairing that needs to be done), and thus fulfill the law of Christ (Christ is in the business of forgiving sins and reconciling men to God and to each other)."

The burden we are to help with is the "fault" of verse one. Because of the love we have one for another we should be concerned when a brother is overcome of temptation and sins. Providing a bag of rice or potatoes and a pound of bacon is not going to fulfill the law of Christ in this passage. The only thing that will do that is helping the man to overcome sin.

Verse 3 - "For if anyone thinks he is something (superior to his erring brother) when he is nothing (he also has sinned at times), he deceives himself."

The first word in verse three shows that the approach mentioned in that verse is the state of mind necessary on the part of the sincere individual who seeks to bear a burden for the backsliding brother per the instructions in verses 1 and 2.

Verse 4 - "But let each one examine his own work (by God's standard instead of by a sinning brother), and then he will have reason (the right) for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in respect to (comparison to the error of) another."

Verse 5 - "For each one shall bear his own load (of God-given responsibility)."

Verse 6 - "And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches." This verse has been used out of its context to prove that we should support those who preach the gospel. While there are several passages in the New Testament that teach that a gospel preacher may be supported, this passage does not so teach. Look again at the context. Paul says when a man sins, help him. When he is restored, he may rejoice in himself. What then? Is he to give the preacher a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken? Is that what Paul is saying? To put such a meaning to the passage degrades the thought Paul has in mind. The thing under consideration is that of an erring brother being corrected by those who are not in error. The one who is taught should come to a point when he participates jointly with the one doing the teaching.

The person who is walking after the flesh and the one who is walking after the Spirit are no longer in step; they are going in different directions; their fellowship has been broken; and the one walking after the flesh is the one guilty of breaking that fellowship. He needs to heed the correction and instruction given him in order that he may return to the fellowship of good things from which he has parted. Hence, Paul admonishes the erring person, "And let the one who is taught the word (the one being corrected) share all good things with him who teaches." In other words, the erring brother is not only to listen, but he is also to do what he is instructed to do to correct the situation in order that fellowship may be restored.

It is true that the word "communicate" in this verse is sometimes used to refer to financial support (see Philippians 4:15). But that has to be determined from the context and not from the word itself. The word translated "communicate" here is also translated "fellowship" and "partaker." Basically, we are told, it means to "share," but what is to be shared must always be determined from the context. It is not included in the word itself.

Verses 7-8 - "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh (by walking after the flesh) shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit (by walking after the Spirit) shall from the Spirit reap eternal life." These verses express the eternal truth taught in Genesis 1:12, that of reaping relative to the sowing. It expresses quite vividly our individual responsibilities in the realm of helping one another, as individuals.

It is quite sad that some are trying to shift their personal burdens to institutions, but their real responsibilities stay with them. God is not mocked--they shall reap as they sow.

Verse 9 - "And let us not lose heart (growing weary or complaining because of prolonged effort) in doing good (it is easy to count them as weary burdens and shift them to others, to the church, or to an institution), for in due time we shall reap (based on our sowing) if we do not grow weary."

Verse 10 - "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

In this verse, Paul gives a general admonition concerning the matter to all Christians. The word translated "therefore" or "so then" connects this verse with what has been said before. In the Greek of this verse, the definite article comes before "good." Paul has in mind "the good" he has been discussing of correcting and instructing those in error, especially those of the "household of faith" that have been overtaken in walking after the flesh.

This verse does not have anything to do with helping those who are materially destitute or in need of financial benevolence. In fact, it has nothing to do with finances at all. It is the need of correcting those in error that is under consideration.

By Bob Buchanon
From Expository Files 12.12; December 2005

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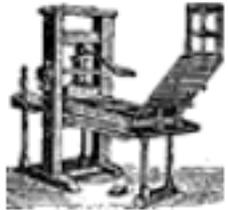
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God's Work, God's Image, God's Distinction

Genesis 1:27

A serious reading of the early chapters of Genesis is crucial to the development, maintenance, instruction and obedience of faith. J. Sidlow Baxter was right. "The major themes of Scripture may be compared to great rivers, ever deepening and broadening as they flow; and it is true to say that all these rivers have their rise in the watershed of Genesis," ("Explore The Book," p.#23). An example of the practical value of teachings in Genesis is this familiar statement:

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them," (Gen. 1:27).

Three things stand out and need our attention:

God's Work: "God created man." This is the truth about our origin. God called into existence that which had no previous existence, and the highest act of this divine work was to create human life. When you read the claims of the Bible, consider the evidence and decide that the document is the Word of God - you are glad to read Genesis 1:27 and accept this truth of man's origin: "God created man." As you hold this conclusion in your heart, you are doing what is described in Hebrews 11. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen . . . by faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible," (Heb. 11:1,3).

Charles Darwin was a British naturalist, who lived from 1809 until 1882, and in his work *The Descent of Man* he asserted: "Man is descended from some lower form." This is just where the confusion begins for Darwin and his disciples. He changed, revised and sometimes contradicted his own theory. And Darwin's "theory of evolution" evolved. Today, there are interpreters of Darwin who debate their interpretations. Some begin with specific observations of Darwin and build a scientific creed. They apply their interpretation of Darwin and label their fellows as either Darwinian, anti-Darwinian or neo-Darwinian (what we sometimes call "drawing lines of fellowship"). There is a growing number of highly esteemed scientists who argue vigorously against Darwinianism (Michael Behe, Robert Jastrow, Phillip Johnson). There are scientific journals published today, devoted to the theme of "Intelligent Design," responding to the old Darwinian models. Thus, there are many, conflicting evolutionary doctrines claiming authority in Darwin, and many non-Darwinian models and theories now gaining more attention. Not all that is called "science" is academic and objective. Modern science is sometimes encumbered by myth, prejudice, politics, arrogance and human competition (just like modern religion).

So what am I to do? What can I believe? What should I teach my children? "God created man!" Hebrews 3:4 teaches that "every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." When you study science, presented with validity and without human agenda, you are studying what God built. Good science yields agreement with the Genesis account, and in particular this affirmation: "God created man."

God's Image: "God created man in His own image." This word "image," in common discourse, is suggestive of something visual. A camera captures an image, for looking; for observation with the physical eye. Pictures or graphics in computer format are often called "images." So the word is often used for something visual; something that becomes the object of sight. Not in Genesis 1:27.

In dealing with the word in this context, we must move beyond simple visual similarity. This "image" is real, but not necessarily or primarily visual. The word "image" in Gen. 1:27 means "likeness, resemblance." The previous verse reports God's declaration: "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."

We were made like God; according to His likeness. Now this cannot be understood as duplication; we are not clones of Deity (see Deut. 4:35). We are like God; we are not God. He made us in His image. We must not attempt to make Him in our image.

Of all God made, He made man unique, like Him. We have the capacity to think, to make choices, to love - unlike plants and animals. We can be good; we can chose good character, do good things, be good people. God never said to a tree, rock or insect, "Be holy, for I am holy," but He says that to us, according to 1 Pet. 1:16. We were made in the image of God.

Sin stifles that resemblance, defacing the image of God. Sin keeps us from personally realizing the full extent of our resemblance to God and living in fellowship with Him. But in your response to Christ, sin is forgiven. And in your continued life of response to Christ, sin is conquered. This was the basis of what Paul said to the saints in Colossae. They had "put on the new self, who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." Romans 8:29 defines this process in these terms: "for whom he foreknew, He also predestined (to become) conformed to the image of His Son." We were created by God, made in His image. Through the choice to sin, we fall into the bondage and guilt of sin (defacing the image). But in obeying the gospel, we are renewed and conformed to the image of His Son.

God's Distinction: "male and female He created them." Because of the systematic working of error in our culture, we have to talk about things we thought we would never have to bring up. I had no idea in my earlier years I would be addressing this peculiarity of our culture: the blending and blurring of gender differences! That distinction God built into nature is today denied, re-defined and perverted, to accommodate the culture (and ultimately, the perverse desires of individuals serving their own lusts). This is where we are in the culture of 2002.

Sometimes we become aware of men who want to be women, and women who want to be men! There is

such a powerful movement, rushing and running away from traditional "gender stereotypes" and roles. According to some who are given their voice by the media, it is no longer good to let the little girls play with dolls and let the little boys have trucks and learn to throw a ball. There is an agenda (subtle in some cases, but bold in others), and the purpose is to deny, confuse and blend the sexes.

Before the Bible is ever opened, the uniqueness of male and female is evidenced in nature. Men and women are different, and that is objectively discernable. Once you get away from the "softer sciences," the evidence joins Biblical truth to confirm the obvious. There are differences in metabolism rate; in skeletal structure; in the circulatory system and certainly in the reproductive system. Forensic scientists can detect the differences between male and female years after the body and spirit have parted! In addition to biological differences, there are social, emotional and psychological differences - about which there was no debate, before the current gender neutral movement (sometimes called "unisex."). {For an excellent study of these issues, see Florida College Annual Lectures, 1995 - In His Image: Male and Female In Nature, by Wayne T. Galloway, p.#151}.

Biblically, here is the case: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." God created man, in His own image, and the distinction is God's: male and female. Sexual differentiation was not a result of social evolution; it was explicit in divine creation. The suitable partner for man was a woman (Gen. 2:18)!

Romans chapter one is describing the behaviors of a people who have forsaken God. This has always been the context of Romans 1 (long before current discussions that confuse the genders).

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." (Rom. 1:26,27).

Paul uses the terms "natural" and "unnatural," reflecting what is explicitly written in Genesis 1:27 - male and female. When men or women choose to ignore the gender distinction God ordained, they go against God, against nature, corrupt themselves, produce victims, contribute to the decay of their society and work against the purposes of Almighty God. And every work against the purposes of God will be defeated.

"We ought not fear the differences between men and women, rather we should fear a loss of that distinction. Does not nature itself teach us that men and women are different? And in agreement with these natural differences and building on them, the Scriptures clearly teach the proper role for men and women. These innate differences and these traditional gender roles have been so fundamental to mankind's progress and happiness that we may have taken for granted their importance. But if we lose these distinctions it will be painfully clear how important they are." (Thaxter Dickey, "Male and Female Created He Them" in the book, "A Tribute To Melvin Curry," p.#87).

Conclusion:

The book of Genesis must continue to inform our faith. Do not be intimidated by any modern efforts to

confuse or merge human science with divine revelation. In these early chapters of Genesis, there is truth given in simple terms, for us to digest and act upon today. If you think you have "grown" beyond the book of Genesis, you have deceived yourself and you have confused growth with apostasy.

Helpful Resources:

"In His Image," The Implications of Creation; FC Annual Lectures, 1995.

"A Tribute To Melvin Curry," see page #71: "Male and Female Created He Them" by Thaxter Dickey.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 9.11; November 2002

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"They Shall Be One Flesh"

Genesis 2:24

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.(Genesis 2:24, KJV).

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.(Genesis 2:24, NIV).

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24, NRSV).

"Therefore..,"

takes us back to what had just happened in this context. God saw it was not good for man to be alone, so He made a suitable helper. The record says that: "...the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." On this occasion Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man." When these creation events took place, God said: "THEREFORE," or "for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." [NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES: Matt. 19: 5 & Eph. 5:31].

"...A man..."

The statement in Genesis 2:24 was meant for every human being. Adam had no father and mother; thus it is implied, this is meant for all in the human race; everybody with a father and mother. God was setting up an institution for the human race.

"...Leave his father and his mother..."

It is noteworthy, there is a "cleaving" in this statement, but before the "cleaving," there is "leaving." This is about leaving your family of origin and making your own family. As vital and permanent as the child-parent relationship is, a proper husband-wife relationship warrants leaving the earlier relationship.

"...And shall cleave unto his wife..."

This is about marriage as God intends it, and this involves leaving and cleaving. Sometimes the English word "cleave" means to divide or split (a butcher uses a cleaver to cut meat). But in Genesis 2:24, the opposite is meant: to adhere, to stick, to be attached by strong tie. It is a verb, and it involves determined

action to stay with somebody, out of deep love and commitment; It is not just emotional; it is not passive; it is the attitude and activity of staying close to someone. It is adherence rooted in a shared will or intent. The same word is used in Deut. 10:20 (NASB) and other passages in that context, to signify wholehearted commitment (Deut. 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). Marriage requires maintenance!

"...One flesh..."

To be one flesh is the result of leaving and cleaving; and this is much more than just a physical union. This is about giving and receiving; joining and responding. This is emotional; this is intellectual; this is about love and care and attention. And - only as we leave and cleave and develop closeness in all these other ways - can there be the kind of physical union that's right, ideal and nourishing. This union should last as long as we live. The Bible teaches one man and one woman for life with only one exception (Matt. 19:9).

When marriage is dealt with in Matthew 19 by Jesus, and Ephesians 5 by Paul, both refer back to God's institution of this union at creation. Here is something that has never changed: The law that binds a man and woman together in this relationship is the law of God, expressed in the statement: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 8.10; October 2001

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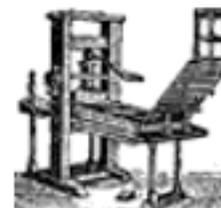


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Sin and its Consequences in This Life

Genesis 3

Our world and our lives have not been made better because of sin. In fact, sin has made everything about our existence much, much worse. The thief may think his life is better after having successfully stolen something valuable. The shoplifter is pleased that he avoided the security cameras. The hedonist is on top of the world with his latest sexual escapade. The con artist found a good mark and the corrupt politician got away with the lie and the drug dealer settled an old score. All of them are pleased that their lives are better for it. But they are wrong. Sin changes things, Many may be subtle changes but in the end the consequences are horrific. If sinners only knew what they were doing to themselves, they would not feel so clever. If disciples will always remember that sin is never free, then they will much better be able to deal with temptation. Sin changes things.

Sin Changes Your Relationship With God

"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." (Genesis 3:8). One observable result of the first sin was fear and insecurity. Before sin, there had been joy, confidence and trust. But sin took all that away and replaced it with fear and guilt.

Adam and Eve had a very immature concept of God, as seen in their attempt to hide from God behind some trees. They could not, and we cannot, either hide our deeds nor ourselves from God. Far better to keep our deeds in line with His commandments, for God does see (Psalm 10:11-13).

Does everyone live in fear who lives in sin. No, not really. If one denies the existence of God, or the reality of judgment, then he or she may succeed in canceling out the fear of judgment. Some boldly mock the idea of the righteous retribution of God, but will they be so bold when they stand in His presence? More likely, they will try to follow the lead of Adam and Eve and vainly find a tree to hide behind (Revelation 6:16,17; Hebrews 10:30,31).

Sin Changes Your Self-Relationship

"Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). One definition of "peace" is the absence of conflict. Up until the time of disobedience, there had not been the daily moral struggle, no pangs of guilt, no inner conflict. It was only when temptation was given permission to bear fruit in Eve's heart that the problem began.

Along with the loss of security in the world came the loss of self esteem.. The peace within was gone, and mankind has been forever since trying to rediscover it. The search has led to many false hopes and promises. The answer was not to be found in eastern religions, drugs, alcohol or suicide. though people have searched in all these to find peace. Some have chosen to just look at themselves as products of blind evolution and their lives are without purpose. Believers are not afraid of death because of confidence in the purposes and promises of God, but these lost ones are not afraid of death because they have nothing much to live for.

It is for this reason that the promise of Jesus, the "prince of peace" to give "peace" is so inviting. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7). The Lord counsels us that we can maintain this peace by keeping our thoughts in perspective. "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." (Philippians 4:8). As I read this verse, I cannot help but think that this probably well describes the minds of Adam and Eve before the fall. In Jesus, we can approach this peace again.

Sin Changes Your Relationship With Others

"And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." (Genesis 3:12). It seems as chivalry was already dead long before the demise of the knights of the round table. Here we see how suspicion and conflict enter into human relationships. This conflict will lead to one of this couple's children murdering his brother, and countless more conflicts through the ages to come. This is the true "mother of all battles."

Jesus advises us on how to repair human relationships and make them what they ought to be. Much of His teachings has to do with that very thing. There are many "one another" passages in the New Testament.

"If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also." (1 John 4:20,21). When we apply the teachings of Christ to our lives, our relationships will improve accordingly. When two true and obvious disciples of Jesus relate to one another, there is no room for distrust, selfishness and suspicion. Think about what this can do for a marriage!

Sin Changes Your Relationship With Nature

"Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life." (Genesis 3:17). Finally, we see that nature itself was cursed. Every human tear of sorrow ever shed can be traced back to the fall. Exhaustion, pain and natural calamity are the result of sin. Sin demands too heavy a price, both now and in eternity, don't you think? There is a better way

(Romans 6:23).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 7.2; February 2000

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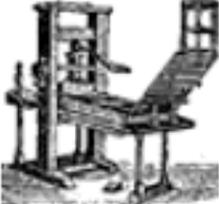
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Genesis Three: A Light in the Darkness

Genesis 3:15

There are several pivotal passages in the Scripture which record events that greatly altered the course of human history. One of these passages is found in Genesis chapter three. It is here that we find sin making its grand entrance into the world, and the beginning of the consequences that would follow. Things would never be the same.

In verses 1-7 we find the temptation and the fall. In verses 8-21 we discover that human suffering, guilt, hardship, pain, sorrow and death all entered the realm of human experience as a result of sin. Finally, in verses 22-24 we find the first human couple expelled from Eden and beginning a much less satisfying existence. Is there any light of hope?

The central theme of the rest of the Bible has to do with the development and implementation of God's plan to save from sin and restore fellowship between Himself and us. The ultimate goal of the plan is "eternal life" - a term the Bible uses to describe the unequaled glory of heaven.

In the middle of the darkness and gloom of Genesis chapter three - verse 15 to be exact - we have the first promise that a Savior is coming who will defeat the work of Satan. In the New Testament, we will find this promise is received by faith in Christ. But here the veil is lifted ever so slightly allowing a small light to shine through. It will grow brighter in the centuries to follow as the prophets expound upon the message of the Messiah to come. And then - Jesus is born in fulfillment of the prophecies and the Provider of redemption and hope.

By Jon W. Quinn
The Front Page

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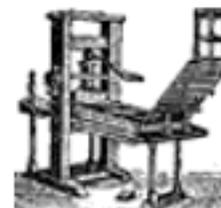


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Sin Changes Things

Genesis 3

Our world has not been made a better place because of sin. Our sins always have a negative impact on our lives. The thief may think that he has improved his life by stealing something valuable. The hedonist imagines that his life could be no better as he relishes his latest sexual conquest and begins to plan for the next. What a good feeling it is to get away with something, whether you are a corrupt politician, a con artist or a shoplifter.

But sin changes things. Subtle but serious changes that have horrendous consequences. If sinners only knew what they were doing to themselves they wouldn't be smiling. If Christians would only remember some of these things when temptation seems so strong then perhaps the temptation would wilt away. Sin changes things.

SIN ALTERS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (GENESIS 3:8).

It had not always been that way. Fear such as this was something new. Before sin there had been only trust and joy, but now that was gone.

The couple had a very immature concept of God. They tried to hide from the One who is all-seeing. Neither can man today hide his actions from the eyes of God. Let your actions be of such a nature that there is no need to hide them.

Yes, there are many people who revel in their rebellion against God. They mock any idea of judgment. They are not made afraid because they refuse to believe that they will ever be called upon to give account for their lives. They may be bold now, but will they when the hour of recompense comes? Adam and Eve did not become afraid until they realized that they were in the immediate presence of the Lord. One passage well describes the reaction of the rebellious as they faced a judgment of the Lord. Remember: these had also previously been bold and mocking in their contempt for Christ and His people; "...and they said to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come;

and who is able to stand?" (REVELATION 6:16,17).

With Adam and Eve, Satan had put a question mark where God had put an exclamation point. What God had forbade Satan had declared permissible. The course of these two lives, as well as the entire span of human history, was changed forever. One sin. One sin can wreck a whole life. It often happens.

No matter how far from God we fall, the answer as to how to be reconciled is always the same. Jesus is the only way to regain fellowship with God. There is no other way. Because we deal with a loving God, He, Himself, has paid the price for our transgressions. The relationship broken by our sins can be restored by God's grace through our faith (JOHN 14:6; EPHESIANS 2:1-10).

SIN ALTERS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil...' (GENESIS 3:22). Man had been at perfect peace with himself. There had been no inner conflict between right and wrong, no pangs of guilt, no struggles. There had really only been one moral choice to make: obey God's command not to eat of the tree in the midst of the garden.

But now there was no peace. That, too, had changed. Something had awakened within Adam and Eve that had taken away their innocence, and with it, the security that they once knew. No longer did the world seem the safe home it once was. They felt threatened and exposed.

The search to regain inner peace continues today. Though the search has led many to false hopes, there is an answer. It is not in eastern cultic religions, they offer no Savior. It is not in drugs and alcohol, they remove no problems and only create more. It is not in suicide, that final solution merely sends one to judgment more quickly. Again, the only correct choice is Jesus. He will restore peace legitimately. He will make it possible for you to face life and death without anxiety. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (PHILIPPIANS 4:7).

SIN ALTERS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

"And the man said, 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate' (GENESIS 3:12).

Now there is strife. There is suspicion, distrust and conflict. In this passage we have the beginning of disharmony in the home. It will lead the way, as the world is populated, to conflict between brothers, between neighbors, between cities and finally between nations. But here we have the beginning. This is the true "mother of all battles" Mr. Saddam.

Again it is Jesus who teaches the principles necessary to get us back on track in all of our human relationships.

The answer is unselfish dedication to others, whether it be husband or wife, brother or sister, neighbor or stranger, friend or enemy.

Only when the teachings of Jesus are applied to our lives can we really expect there to be much improvement in this area. Whenever two people are obviously dedicated to the teachings of Christ, distrust and suspicion between them will dissolve and be replaced by trust and confidence. That is why Christians will make the best husbands and wives; friends and neighbors; employers and employees. They have risen above the world's standards in their dealings with their fellow human beings. God is the greatest builder of human relationships; Satan is the destroyer of whatever good relationships we may enjoy.

SIN ALTERS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

"...cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (GENESIS 3:17).

Various natural consequences resulted from the first sin. Not only was the ground cursed, but being separated from the tree of life meant that man became mortal and destined to die. From then on, through one means or another, the day would come for each human being where the body of flesh would fail and the spirit depart.

Pain in childbirth, wasteful vegetation such as thorns and thistles and physical exhaustion are other results mentioned specifically in the context. Everywhere we look today we see human suffering caused by living in a fallen world. No human tear of sorrow or pain has ever been shed but what can ultimately be traced back to the first sin. And sin has its direct consequences as well: disease, hunger and poverty are many times the direct result of sin.

Again, the answer to this human dilemma is Jesus. he said, "And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also." (JOHN 14:3). The place prepared by Jesus is referred to in the Bible as "the new heavens and a new earth." It is described as a place where tears have been wiped away, where there is no more pain or death, sickness or crying. This is our destiny if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. It is the only answer available to those who are tired of the human condition.

Sin has demanded too heavy a price. There is a better course to choose. There are much better things to enjoy. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (ROMANS 6:23).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 3.2; February 1996

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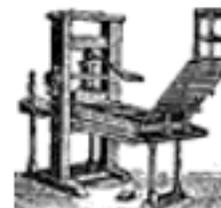


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It Was A Religious War

Genesis 4:1-12

Recently, a well known entertainer, ex-Beatle Paul McCartney, remarked how that religion was responsible for so much war in history. He's right, it has been. Often world religions have extolled peace while bringing war. Paul's friend John Lennon wrote a song entitled "Imagine" where he invites us to imagine a world without religion, or thoughts of God or heaven or hell... or politics or nations or personal property, and with everyone living just for today.

Concerning violence as it relates to religion, it must be understood that the culprit is not religion itself, but evil tendencies brought on by envy or jealousy or greed or pride. A power hungry despot may well urge his followers on, even inflaming them with religious rhetoric, but that is just a cover up of his evil motivations. That's also why we are often left scratching our heads when men call upon God for justification of the most horrendous acts of cruelty, hatred and mayhem. We seem to understand that God condemns such behavior.

The fact is, if these quasi-religious leaders lived in a world with no religion, no concept of God or heaven or hell, they would be just as hateful and cruel and violent. It is their own evil lusts that is responsible. Religion is just window dressing. Perhaps a good way to examine this issue would be to look at the first "war". It, too, was set against a religious back drop. But religion was not the cause of it. Consider the first surprise attack launched in human history.

Background of the Conflict

After Adam and Eve were driven from the garden as a consequence for their disobedience, Eve conceived and gave birth to Cain (Genesis 4:1). Then she gave birth to another son and named him Abel. In the relationship between God and these two sons of Adam, and in their relationship to each other, we learn several principles.

Abel was a keeper of sheep and offered the "firstlings" of his flock. Cain offered his offering of the fruit of the ground. (Genesis 4:2-4). Centuries later, Jesus would call Abel "righteous Abel" for the manner in which he worshipped God and lived his life (Matthew 23:35). He offered a sacrifice that was "more excellent" than his brother's (Hebrews 11:4). The Scriptures tell us that the Lord respected Abel and his offering but did not respect Cain and his offering (Genesis 4:4,5).

God expects a sacrifice or an offering from man. Today, it is the praise of our lips and the service we render in the name of the Lord (Romans 12:1,2; Hebrews 13:15,16). Just like in the beginning, these sacrifices can be accepted or rejected by the Lord. Only that which God commanded is acceptable to

Him as an offering (John 4:23, 24; Matthew 15:8,9; Colossians 3:16,17). Also, God expects the first and best from us, and has a right to expect nothing less than that (Matthew 6:33; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Malachi 1:6-10; 12,13).

We are never really told why the Lord rejected Cain's sacrifice. Some have thought that it was because he did not offer an animal sacrifice like Abel did, but we recall that God did at times require both animal and vegetable sacrifices.

It could also be that Cain's heart just was not right. Or maybe he offered that which was rotten or spoiled. Whatever it was, it was not righteous and faithful as Abel's was.

The Anger Of Cain

Cain was angered when the Lord did not respect his sacrifice. The anger was evident in his countenance, or the expression on his face (Genesis 4:5). The options open to Cain were explained to him by the Lord (Genesis 4:7).

If you do well, you will be accepted .

If you do not do well sin lies at the door.

Cain's actions were subject to his decision. This does not all have to end badly, even at this point. There need not be war, but if there is, the source of the problem is not that Abel worshipped God by faith, but Cain's unwillingness to do what is right.

If you do well, God will receive you. Our past may not have been "done well" but that does not mean our present and future must match past failures. It is up to us (John 15:5; Acts 10:34,35; 2:38; 8:22).

Sin is ready to take advantage of you if you allow it to do so. Do not make yourself vulnerable (Ephesians 6:10-13; 1 Peter 5:8). Like Cain, your actions are up to you. To trust and obey... or not, in good times or bad is our decision to make. "Oh, my problems are worse than everyone else's so God will overlook my neglect!" Do not count on it (1 Peter 5:9; 4:19).

"Religious War"

It was a "day that will live in infamy!" Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). Cain was of the wicked one. He was angry with his brother because his brother was doing what was right and he wasn't! (1 John 3:12). But Cain's jealousy was not caused by religion. If there had been no sacrifice unto the Lord, and if Abel has been successful and Cain not in some other area, Cain's reaction would have been the same.

Of course, God was displeased with Cain. He cursed Cain. The ground would not longer yield its strength for Cain (Genesis 4:12). Cain would be a fugitive and vagabond (4:12). A mark would be placed upon Cain to prevent him from being murdered for his deed (4:15).

Men do become angry when they are unwilling to do as God says (Galatians 4:16; Acts 7:54-60). But pleasing God is as easy as doing from the heart, earnestly and diligently, what God has commanded (1 John 3:24).

Also, murder is condemned (see also Genesis 9:6). But we should also understand that harboring hatred in our hearts is also contrary to God's will for us (1 John 3:10,11; 4:20,21).

And a final thought: The blood of Abel brought a curse, but the blood of Christ brings forgiveness (Hebrews 12:24). It speaks better than the blood of Abel.

So, it is not religion that is the source of the problem, even in the so called "religious wars." Instead, the sources are the same as they always are for any human conflict; greed, hatred, jealousy and pride. Jesus came to show us a better way. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 9.5; May 2003

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The Example of Abel

Genesis 4:1-10

There are several Old Testament characters about whom we know a great deal, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. There are others about whom we know very little, sometimes not even their names, such as Lot's wife, the butler and baker in Egypt, and David's little child who died. Then there are those in between, about whom we know some but not a whole lot. The story of Abel, found in Genesis 4:1-10, would fall into the latter category.

However, the lives of all people recorded in the Old Testament, whether we know much or little, are there for a reason. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4). It is not just to give us some interesting biographical or historical information, but to provide important lessons by which we can learn something about God's will for us. What can we learn from the example of Abel?

Obeying

To begin, we see that Abel obeyed. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have acquired a man from the LORD.' Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering" (Gen. 4:1-4).

Why did God respect Abel and his offering? The Bible says that it was because Abel acted by faith. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks" (Heb. 11:4). There is only one way to act by faith. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Thus, we conclude that God must have spoken. We do not know exactly what God told Cain and Abel about sacrifices. The most logical conclusion is that He wanted animals offered. But whatever He said, Abel did exactly as He commanded.

From Abel's example we can see the importance of obeying God's will. We must obey God to meet His conditions for our salvation. "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). However, even after we become Christians, we must continue to obey God in all things. Paul wrote to the saints at Philippi and said, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out

your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). We need to obey as Abel did.

Suffering

Next, we see that Abel suffered because He obeyed God. In contrast to God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, it is said, "But He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.' Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (Gen. 4:5-8).

Why did this event occur? It is an example of the righteous being persecuted by the unrighteous. "Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12). Cain chose to follow the will of the evil one in offering a sacrifice that was not acceptable to God. Rather than repenting, he continued to listen to the evil one in venting his frustration by murdering his righteous brother. Jesus warned us that such things would happen. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matt. 5:10-11).

Christians in the first century often were persecuted for righteousness' sake (Acts 5:40-42). And even though we may not be put to death, as were Abel and many in the first century, we are told, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). From the example of Abel, we can learn to expect it.

Speaking

Finally, we see that Abel still speaks. "Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground'" (Genesis 4:9-10). Even then, though Abel was dead, his blood spoke to God. And remember that the writer of Heb. 11:4 said that he, being dead, still speaks. Though now long dead, Abel still speaks to us because his obedience and suffering for righteousness' sake are recorded in the scriptures, so that Jesus was able to make reference to him (Matt. 23:34-35).

However, our lives are not recorded in the scriptures. So when we die, can we yet speak, and if so, how? One way is by the influence that we have on our families. "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Let me cite a personal example. I am a Christian because I heard and obeyed the gospel of Christ, but the circumstances that brought me to hear and obey the gospel are interesting in this regard. At some time in my family's history, I do not know exactly when, where, or how, one or more of my ancestors heard and obeyed the gospel. As a result of teaching done in the family, my grandfather was brought up in the training and admonition of the Lord, so that he became a gospel preacher. In turn, he brought up my mother to know the Lord and become a Christian, and it was from her that I first came to remember the Creator in the days of my youth. So, someone whose name I do not even know still speaks through my life.

Another way that we can speak is by our example on our friends. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Even young people who are trying to serve the Lord can be a good example to their friends at school and play, so that in later years, perhaps after they are dead, others whom they have influenced for good may still remember them. I have heard older Christians on occasion speak of some friend who is no longer alive but led them to Christ when they were younger. Such influence can still speak after death like Abel does.

Conclusion

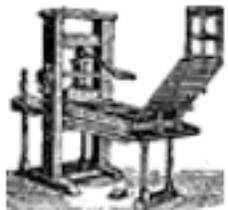
We do not know very much about Abel, other than that he was thesecond son of Adam and Eve, that he was a shepherd, and that he was murdered by his brother Cain. Yet, by what we do know about him, he still speaks to us regarding the need to obey God, to be willing to suffer for righteousness' sake, and to be a good influence upon others. May we learn these lessons and follow this great example in our lives today

By Wayne S. Walker
From Expository Files 9.1; January 2002

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Adam's Family

Genesis 5

In chapter five of Genesis, we read of ten generations, beginning with Adam, and ending with the sons of Noah. In Genesis eleven, we also find ten generations, beginning with Shem and ending with Abraham. These generations are also found in the genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3). These genealogies say very little of these men except that they lived, fathered children, and died. Death had entered the world with the sin of Adam. Victory over death would come through the descendent of these men. In this article, we will consider some of the notable persons in the family of Adam.

Some suggest that these genealogies are not complete, but rather just list the more notable characters and then skips several generations (the Bible does sometimes do this (Matthew 1:1), but I can see no evidence of it in these Old Testament records. Maybe... maybe not.

Seth (Gen. 4:25,26; 5:6-8)

Seth was the son of Adam and Eve. Three of the second generation of mankind are named; Cain, Abel and Seth. Many fail to realize that Adam and Eve had many other sons and daughters who are not mentioned by name in the Bible (Genesis 5:3,4). The children of these sons and daughters of Adam and Eve became the parents of the third generation.

Due to the long life spans of human beings before the flood, it was not uncommon to live hundreds of years, living to see one's great great great great great great grand children. We find people having children on into the second century of life (it was nothing to have a child in one's 60's or 70's). After the flood, human longevity drops dramatically as the aging process is accelerated.

The population would grow quickly because of this, and herein is the key to the old question, "Where did Cain get his wife?" The answer, from a group of Adam's descendants who settled in the land of Nod, perhaps a century or two later (Genesis 4:16-17). The human population would have been quite numerous by then.

The name "Seth" means "set", or "appoint." Adam named him Seth because God had appointed seed from him instead of Abel, who was murdered by Cain (4:26). The implication is even more far reaching than this; for God had promised the coming of One who would defeat Satan (Genesis 3:15). It would be through Seth's descendants that this promise would be fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 3:38).

Seth named one of his sons Enosh, which means "frailty." (Genesis 5:6-8). Enosh is the son through whom the Messianic promise is fulfilled. Again, Seth had other sons and daughters, and along with his

brothers and sisters, are multiplying themselves rapidly. The Bible says that in the days of Seth, "men began to call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26). It has been suggested that Seth named his son Enosh (frailty) because he recognized the frailty of man and their need for God. Therefore they began to call on the name of the Lord.

The word "LORD" is from the Hebrew "Yahweh" or "Jehovah". It describes the eternal, self-existing nature of God... the "I Am"; One without beginning or end. The phrase "Call upon His name" shows trust in His mercy and the realization that we need His care. It is a humbling of oneself before God in worship and obedience.

Interestingly enough, contrast this with the statement about Cain (4:16). Sethites "call upon the name of the Lord" while Cain (and his descendants) are described as going "out from the presence of the Lord."

[Enoch \(Gen. 5:21-24\)](#)

Enoch "walked with God." He had close communion with God and directed his life in accordance with God's will. The Scriptures also state that Enoch "was not, for God took him." This expression means that Enoch did not die like those who preceded him. Instead, God "translated" him.

This is the same expression used concerning Elijah who also did not die but was taken into heaven (2 Kings 2:3-5). Enoch "walked with God" meaning he lived by faith and was pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:5). Without faith one cannot be pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:6). Enoch "sought for God" and was rewarded by God. In the New Testament, Jude called Enoch a prophet (Jude 14). This prophecy deals with the judgment of God upon the ungodly. Enoch's message to his generation was one of warning of God's judgment.

[Methuselah \(Gen. 5:25-27\)](#)

The only notable thing about Methuselah was that of all those mentioned in the Bible, he lived the longest, 969 years. Which would you rather do; live as long as Methuselah, or please God? Methuselah lived a long time, but was not pleasing to God (Genesis 6:5,8). The Bible states that only Noah was righteous during a time when Methuselah still lived. Interestingly, Methuselah died the year of the flood. We do not know if he died previous to the flood, or in it.

[Noah \(Gen. 5:29\)](#)

The name Noah means "rest." Lamech, Noah's father, gave him this name because, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed" This reminds us of the original cursing of the ground. Noah's parents look forward to Noah helping them toil out a living hoping it will ease their burden of survival.

But with Noah will come a different kind of rest; a rest of the earth itself from the sin which plagued it.

[Things to Think About](#)

The consequences of Adam's sin, physical death, continued through his offspring. Repeatedly the phrase is used in Genesis five; "and he died". The one exception is Enoch, as we already noted. For help, we turn to the One who blessed Enoch with life (John 11:23-26; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

Men should call on the name of the Lord. Today, since Jesus has now come, this entails obeying His gospel by faith (Romans 10:13). This involves baptism to have our sins washed away (Acts 22:16; 2:37,38).

Finally, one can "please God" by "walking with Him." Like Enoch, we need to "walk with God" by faith. It is the wise thing to do (Ephesians 5:15; 1 John 1:6-7). Remember, you and I are a part of Adam's family as well.

By Jon W. Quinn

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From Expository Files 9.8; August 2002

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Causes Of The Flood

Genesis 6:1-8

When you begin to read the Bible and you start in the beginning with Genesis, you learn that God created the heavens and the earth and God made man in his own image. God put man in the garden and gave him a suitable companion. They were blessed by God and enjoyed life without shame before the choice to sin. This peaceful existence was enjoyed by Adam and Eve until they disobeyed God, resulting in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Children were born to Adam and Eve, but Cain killed Abel. Genesis chapter five is a written account of Adam's line, from Seth through Noah. And you will notice, in Genesis chapter five, over a dozen men are listed, but only of one man is it said, "he walked with God." His name was Enoch.

Then you come to a time (Genesis 6), when evil on the earth was so widespread; when sin became so popular, it became the common way of life. God was watching. He "was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart," (Gen. 6:6)

A deluge of water was sent by God, to destroy and cleanse the earth. Only Noah and his immediate family remained after the event, to make a new start. Why did this happen? What causes are documented in the Scriptures? I will not try to address every form of sin that prevailed in the pre-flood era, but want to highlight three causes, apparent in Gen. 6:1-8.

"Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." (Genesis 6:1-8)

(1) Marriage Without Maturity

How were marriages commonly entered into in the pre-flood era? Men saw beautiful women and took them for themselves. Jesus referred to this when He said: "They ate, they drank, they married wives;

they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:27).

I do not believe the Bible recommends what people call "love at first sight." I know, there are stories people tell that have great sentimental and romantic appeal. "When I first saw Matilda, I knew she would be my wife." Likewise, I understand, it may happen that two people begin a relationship based on nothing but visual attraction. But then they apply themselves to the relationship; it endures and thrives. But good marriages do not mature and find permanence because of physical attraction! "Love at first sight" is not the Biblical ideal for beginning a marriage. To be captivated by physical beauty and charm makes good songs and movies, but can never be the strength or bond of a true marriage.

What should a man look for? "...Let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God," (1 Pet. 3:4). Beauty, academic accomplishment, wealth, talent, social charm or popularity - all combined do not compare to character. (The next time you read the text in Prov. 31, consider that the text gives no hint or implication of what this woman looked like, only her good heart and responsible behavior.)

This doesn't mean that good women are ugly! The recommendation of Scripture is not - that you must ignore physical beauty. But it must be put in perspective, secondary to character. The highest kind of beauty is "the hidden person of the heart." (See also, Prov. 12:26).

One expression of the sinfulness of man that led to the great flood was the seeking of mates based on carnal and sensual motive.

(2) Popularity Without Piety

The ruling men of the time were "heroes of old, men of renown." Unlike Enoch, who walked with God (Gen. 5:22,24) and Noah who responded obediently to the grace of God (Gen. 6:8-22), these men were driven by self-exaltation, ambition to dominate and conquer; to be known and praised by all men. They were willing to form unholy alliances, use carnal violence, shun God and His moral order and seek to make a name for themselves.

After the flood, the same evil was apparent. Men came together and reasoned: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves..." (Gen. 11:4). "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he," (Prov. 16:18-20).

When we seek our own popularity, that self-exaltation puts us on threatening spiritual ground. It is displeasing to the Lord, injurious to others, morally destructive and often counter-productive to promote yourself. Inordinate pride sets us in the direction of extreme rebellion against God. Paul wrote of "the son of perdition" who would oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God (2 Thess. 2:4).

To avoid this evil (personal pride, haughty spirit), follow Christ, who said, "I am gentle and lowly in heart," (Matt. 11:29). And, "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . Let nothing be

done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem another better than himself," (Phil. 2:5,3). Pride without piety will cause a flood of awful consequence in your life.

(3) Thinking Without Truth

"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

This is not about occasional evil thoughts, immediately rejected. Look at what God saw. "...That every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, all the time." Here is a significant statement: Only evil, all the time! Letting your mind fall under evil influence; becoming absorbed by evil; thinking, dreaming, talking and living evil - that's the essence of this form of sin.

One of the other vivid descriptions of human evil in the Bible is found in Isaiah 59. The chapter begins with the well-known affirmation, that sin separates us from God. Through the rest of the chapter, there are specific definitions of sin: Dishonesty, Violence, Oppression, Revolt. But in the middle of this chapter, there is this statement in verse 7: "Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity." The sin they do, finds its original power in the sin they think about. Minds not governed by the truth of God, but filled with thoughts of iniquity - cause a flood of horrible outcome. Jesus said "from within" come the common evils in human behavior (Mark 7:20-23).

To avoid this, "keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life," (Prov. 4:23). It is my responsibility to protect my mind, by using the truth of God to protect myself against the assaults of the devil.

What happened that was so bad, God sent that great flood? Marital choices without mature consideration of character; the seeking of personal popularity, but without any pious influence, and the exercise of the human mind, absent the government of divine truth. These things are just as destructive today. But Jesus gave His life, so we wouldn't have to live destructive, disobedient lives. Like Noah, we can find that grace, act on it and be saved.

"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).

By Warren E. Berkley
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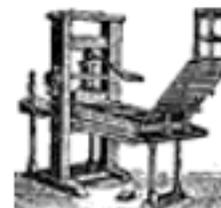


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The Promises of God To Abraham

Genesis 12:1-3

If you want to understand the Bible, start reading. There is no better place to start than in the beginning, Genesis. Commit yourself to a personal journey throughout the entire Bible. Begin in Genesis. Read the entire Bible (perhaps based on an annual schedule). When you finish, read it again. If you will do this, year after year - with all perseverance and diligence - you can develop a good working (practical) knowledge of the Bible to use in your life.

Begin in Genesis because that is the beginning. If you skip Genesis you will come to text after Genesis that will make no sense. There will be statements in the New Testament you cannot deal with if you have not read the book of Genesis.

One passage you will come to in this good pursuit is Genesis 12:1-3. Being familiar with this passage will provide good insight into the book of Romans and Galatians, for example. This has to do with the origin of the Jewish nation, the disposition of the land we now call Palestine, and the spiritual blessings we can enjoy in Christ today.

"Now the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." {Gen. 12:1-3}

In the New King James, the New International Version, and the King James, this is written as an explanation and in past tense: "Now the Lord had said to Abram." In the genealogical account in the last part of chapter eleven we are introduced to Terah, the father of Abram. We are told the family moved from Ur to Haran, and at Haran Terah died. Genesis 12 begins by explaining why they moved: "...the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country....."

In this communication from God to Abram, we discover three distinctive promises and we may refer to the three as - the land promise, the national promise and the spiritual promise.

1. The Land Promise: "A land that I will show you."

2. The National Promise: "A great nation."

3. The Spiritual Promise: "All the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In order to understand these promises, we must follow them through the text of Scripture to the points of fulfillment. We should not just read the promises, forget them and go on. In reading the Old Testament, when we come to a prophecy or a promise - we need to keep reading to find the point or points of fulfillment. If we neglect that there will be a hole in our Bible knowledge. Our task is to track these three promises.

The Land Promise

God called Abram out of his homeland, "to a land" that He would show him. That's in Gen. 12:1 (the last phrase). Also in Genesis 12, observe the statement in verse 7. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So, a land would be given to the descendants of Abram - that's the essence of the first promise.

When you read this promise of land to the descendants of Abram (or Abraham), one thing immediately comes to mind. If you have read the Bible, you know something about the history of the Old Testament. When you come to this promise of land to the descendants of Abraham, one thing enters your mind and that is à the children of Israel entering into the land of Canaan! That conclusion is correct. It is taught in Scripture.

The Bible says, that the promise of land to the descendants of Abraham was fulfilled when God gave them the promised land. Consider this reality as revealed in these places:

Ex. 6:2-8

2And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. 3I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them. 4I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. 5And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. 6Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD.'"

This is what God said to Moses, the leader of Israelite nation. At the time God said this to Moses they were not there yet. But this statement adds testimony and confirms that the land promise to Abraham's descendants has to do with the Israelite nation entering the promised land, Canaan.

Deut. 1:6-8

6"The LORD our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. 7Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring places in

the plain, in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates.

Moses was speaking to the nation of Israel in the land of Moab, east of the Jordan.

Joshua 1:1-6.

1After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: 2"Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them-the children of Israel. 3Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. 4From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. 5No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. 6Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

This was "after the death of Moses." God said to Joshua, "Arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them..."

Acts 7:2-5 & vss. 44-46

2And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' 4Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.

44"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, 45which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, 46who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. 47But Solomon built Him a house.

Psalms 105:7-13, 42-45

7 He is the LORD our God;
His judgments are in all the earth.
8 He remembers His covenant forever,
The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations,
9 The covenant which He made with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac,
10 And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,
To Israel as an everlasting covenant,

11 Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
As the allotment of your inheritance,"
12 When they were few in number,
Indeed very few, and strangers in it.
13 When they went from one nation to another,
From one kingdom to another people,

42 For He remembered His holy promise,
And Abraham His servant.
43 He brought out His people with joy,
His chosen ones with gladness.
44 He gave them the lands of the Gentiles,
And they inherited the labor of the nations,
45 That they might observe His statutes
And keep His laws.
Praise the LORD!

God did what He said. He said this land would be given to the descendants of Abraham. The Bible says God did that. He fulfilled that promise. Joshua believed this, for just before his death he said to the people: "...not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you," (Josh. 23:15).

The Second Promise: A Nation

God fulfilled the second promise when He formed a great nation from the descendants of Abraham. The following passages show the fulfillment of the second promise.

In Gen. 46:3, God spoke to Israel, the man also called Jacob, and God said: "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there." This is what God said to Abraham's grandson Jacob (called Israel after Gen. 32) and the descendants of Abraham were called Israel, the children of Israel; Israelites - who went down to Egypt as the family of Joseph, but came out - a great nation.

After the family arrived in Egypt and were cared for by Joseph, he died, and the family grew. Exodus 1:7 says: "But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mightily; and the land was filled with them."

In Deut. 1, Moses is addressing the nation of Israel, east of the Jordan, with these words:

1:8 Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD swear unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.

1:9 And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone:

1:10 The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.

1:11 (The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you,

as he hath promised you!)

Already in Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy there are these statements leaving no doubt, when God formed the Jewish nation, He was fulfilling His promise to Abraham - multiplying his seed into a great nation.

Hebrews 11:11-12

11By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude-innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

God formed a nation out of the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and gave them the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua. This is the fulfillment of two of the promises God made to Abraham: The land promise and the national promise. We have one more promise, but something needs attention first.

When we talk about God forming a nation from the descendants of Abraham and giving them the land of Canaan there is something else to be considered: God told this nation, God told His people - if they sinned, they would be driven out of the land He had given them:

Lev. 26:27-39

27 'And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me,

28 then I also will walk contrary to you in fury;

and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

29 You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.

30 I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols;

and My soul shall abhor you.

31 I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas.

32 I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it.

33 I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you;

your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

34 Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths.

35 As long as it lies desolate it shall rest-

for the time it did not rest on your sabbaths when you dwelt in it.

36 'And as for those of you who are left, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies;

the sound of a shaken leaf shall cause them to flee;

they shall flee as though fleeing from a sword, and they shall fall when no one pursues.

37 They shall stumble over one another, as it were before a sword, when no one pursues;

and you shall have no power to stand before your enemies.

38 You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.

39 And those of you who are left shall waste away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; also in their fathers' iniquities, which are with them, they shall waste away.

Deut. 30:17-20

17But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, 18I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. 19I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; 20that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Let's put all this together: God promised Abraham that a great nation would be formed from his descendants and they would be given the land of Canaan. But God said clearly, sin would result in their being driven from the land. Bible students know that is exactly what happened! The Israelites sinned grievously, and although Jehovah was patient and longsuffering with them - He eventually did what He said.

The northern kingdom of Israel was carried away into Assyrian Captivity in 733 B.C. (2 Kings 17:5-6, 22-23).

The southern kingdom of Judah was carried away into Babylonian Captivity in about four stages of expulsions (2 Chron. 36, Dan. 1, 2 Kings 24).

God said this captivity would last seventy years, then only a remnant would be restored to the land, not the whole nation (Isa. 10:20-25; Jer. 23:3-4).

Now back to the promises to Abraham, revealed in Genesis 12.

We know about the fulfillment of two of those promises: God formed a nation from the offspring of Abraham; that nation was Israel; the land promise was fulfilled when they came into the land of Canaan under Joshua.

We have one more promise:

"And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

We started our study in Genesis in chapter eleven and twelve with our focus on Abraham and his family; then Isaac; then Jacob or Israel; then the nation formed, called Israel, and the giving of Canaan to that nation.

Now in this third promise the statement is not confined to an immediate, single family or a single nation,

but "all all the families of the earth!"

What did God do that holds opportunity for "all?" What did God do - what offer, what gift that is available to bless "all the families of the earth?"

This is about Christ!

Acts 3:24-26.

24Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. 25You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' 26 To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."

Gal. 3:7-9

7Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 9So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Gal. 3:13-18

13Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), 14that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

15Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. 16Now 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. 17And 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. 18For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Isn't this clear? God fulfilled the third promise when He sent Jesus Christ to die for the sins of the world. Today - anybody can respond to the Good News of Christ and be saved. The gospel is God's offer of salvation in Christ - to "all the families of the earth."

Whoever you are; whatever your blood line or national origin - you can hear, believe and obey the gospel. And thus become a participant in the spiritual promise God made to Abraham. All three promises to Abraham, in Genesis 12, fulfilled! God formed a nation from his offspring - gave them the land of Canaan. Then Christ came. Paul said, in Galatians 3:26-28 ...

26For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if you are Christ's, then you are

Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Does God have a nation today? He does. Peter wrote this to Christians: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1 Pet. 2:9.

I need to deal with one more matter that concerns all of this, and is relevant to things you may hear in our time. God had a plan. In bringing His plan to completion, He chose and used various people. He formed a nation from the offspring of Abraham and God did everything that He promised. To use the language of Joshua in Josh. 24 - "not one thing has failed." God had a plan ... it led to Jesus Christ ... so that today, "whosoever believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."

This means the Biblical nation of Israel has served the purpose for which it was divinely created, and there are no obligations we have as Christians to hold the modern nation of Israel above other nations; no biblical grounds to esteem the modern nation of Israel above others! (See Acts 10:35)

Now I should be careful here, in what I say and you should read carefully. We may feel great sympathy toward the modern nation of Israel. We may be in favor of political friendship. We may observe how those people have been mis-treated and want to help.

There is little doubt - the Israelis have been the victims of terror. So - we may feel great sympathy toward the modern nation of Israel, and we may agree that the United States should maintain a good relationship with them. But all of this cannot be argued on Biblical grounds. We have no instructions from God - to maintain higher loyalty to modern Israel, above other peoples.

In Romans chapters 9-11, Paul argues against any theocratic definition of Israel. He acknowledges the role Israel had before Christ came, but denies any theocratic definition of this nation. He says, "whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved."

Let me illustrate what we need to guard against.

Jerry Falwell: "God has raised up America in these last days for the cause of world evangelism and for the protection of His people, the Jews. I don't think America has any other right or reason for existence than those purposes... to stand against Israel is to stand against God."

A pro-Israeli Kansas journalist: "As a gentile American, as a Christian who considers loyalty to God above all human commitments, if the choice ever comes between loyalty to Israel, I have no choice. I must stand by Israel."

The bible doesn't teach us this! The religious doctrine called pre-millennialism demands this position - but the Bible doesn't tell us to stand with Israel, no matter what! God did everything He said to Abraham. And the modern nation of Israel is not the same as the biblical nation, used by God before Christ.

When people talk with you about: Israel's biblical right to the land ...protecting them today, so that

future purposes can be fulfilled - that's the language and teaching of premillennialism not the Bible. The only thing left for the Jews today is - to believe and obey Christ. Jews or Gentiles - "whosever!" Our loyalty must be directed to Christ, who is our only hope of peace.

Based on article by Kevin Kay, and material by Ferrell Jenkins.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 11.7; July 2004

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Pitching Tents Toward Sodom

Genesis 13

As Abram (later Abraham) and Lot lived and prospered in the land of Canaan, we are told in Genesis 13:1-9 that the land could no longer support the flocks of Abram and Lot together. This situation required a difficult decision-- the type of decision that many face during their lives. Lot was given the opportunity to decide where he wanted to live. We can read of his decision in Genesis 13:10-12:

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar. So Lot chose him all the Plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

In economic terms, Lot made a good decision. He chose the land that would provide him the best chance for success-- the green land that provided great areas for pasture. There was only one problem with this land, as revealed in Genesis 13:13:

Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the LORD exceedingly.

The land was good; its inhabitants, however, left much to be desired. Lot's decision would cost him greatly! Let us now consider the consequences of Lot's decision to live in the midst of an exceedingly wicked people.

Pitching his tents toward Sodom cost Lot dearly twice. Lot was not the only one to see that the land was good; it was also under the hand of kings from the east. These kings fought against the kings of the area of Sodom, defeated them, and Lot was taken captive (Genesis 14:1-12). Had it not been for Abram and his forces, Lot would have lost everything and would have been a slave back in Mesopotamia (Genesis 14:13-16)! Later, when Lot received divine visitors as guests, he felt compelled to offer the Sodomites his own daughters to defile rather than the visitors (Genesis 19:1-8). The next day, Lot fled from Sodom as God rained fire and brimstone upon the city, and his wife turned into a pillar of salt when she looked

back (cf. Genesis 19:17-29). While his wife made the decision herself to look back and disobey God, had Lot never been in Sodom in the first place, the temptation would not have been present!

Lot's ability to raise good children was rather compromised. Lot's daughters were married to certain men of the city; while we do not know how righteous they were, we know that there were fewer than ten in the whole city, and therefore it is doubtful that they were good influences (cf. Genesis 18:31-33). Furthermore, the fact that afterward they both made their father drunk so as to have children by him does not speak well of them (Genesis 19:30-38). Since Sodom was so saturated with sin, should we be surprised to consider that Lot's daughters were easily infected by it?

While we cannot know what was going through Lot's mind while he was in the cave after the destruction of Sodom, we can wonder whether he was reflecting back on that fateful day recorded in Genesis 13 when he made his decision to pitch his tents toward Sodom. If he had to do it all over again, what choice would he have made?

We can certainly sympathize with Lot's plight, for we ourselves live in a sinful world and have been called upon to live in the midst of sinners (1 John 2:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). It is not as if we have the opportunity to separate ourselves entirely from sinners; how can we be lights in darkness if we are only around the light (cf. Matthew 5:13-16)?

Nevertheless, many times we do have the opportunity to make decisions as to where we will live, and we ought to consider Lot's example when we do. After all, Abraham also lived as a sojourner in the midst of people who also were sinners, and yet he did not suffer nearly as much as Lot! The land was perhaps not as good in the rest of Canaan, but the people were not as exceedingly sinful and respected Abraham (cf. Genesis 23:3-6).

We may be called upon to choose between two habitations. One may represent a great financial opportunity, and one will easily be able to satisfy physical needs and to support the family. What if that place has no congregation of brethren of like precious faith? With whom will you associate? How will you teach your children righteousness? There may be another habitation, where one will perhaps not have the best opportunity, but one can associate with good brethren and at least gain the respect of the rest of the community. Is not the benefit to the family far more worthwhile than a bit more money?

Lot shows that it is possible to live righteously in the midst of wicked sinners. His sufferings, however, ought to show us that we need to diligently consider how our environment affects our family and their relationships with God. Let us take care not to pitch our tents toward Sodom to our own destruction!

By Ethan R. Longhenry
From Expository Files 14.4; April 2007

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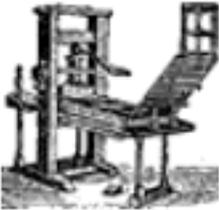
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God Makes No Mistakes

Genesis 18:1-33

Anyone who understands the truth about God knows that God does not make mistakes. Not a one. Never.

But that is not to say that it does not appear to us that sometimes maybe He has. But it is our perspective that is limited, while God's is infinite. In the final analysis, the mistake will always be ours, due to our limited knowledge and wisdom (Job 42:1-3; Isaiah 55:8,9).

If you were to think that only people that were unbelievers, or perhaps with only very weak faith, would ever question God's decisions, plans or deeds, you would be wrong. In fact, the foremost example of faith in the Bible is that of Abraham. But sometimes, even Abraham had questions in his mind about whether God was doing the right thing.

He handled his puzzlement correctly. He was, after all, a man of great faith. He did not foolishly charge God, or mock Him, or rebel against Him, or curse Him. That is what many have done, and are doing, even today. But he did have some serious questions. I think, if we were to admit it, we would all have to say the same thing. Sometimes it is difficult for us to understand why God did this or didn't do that. That puts us in the company of Abraham, as long as we handle our puzzlement the same way he did. We continue to live by faith even when we do not perceive all of the answers. Being in the company of Abraham is being in pretty good company.

God's Friend

"...and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." (James 2:23).

First, Abraham walked with God in his life. Whatever questions Abraham may have had from time to time were not the result of his being hostile in mind toward God. He was not a rebel against the King of all.

Abraham's attitude was always, "When God speaks, I will respond in faith." He was quick to hear, not merely listen. In the New Testament, the Bible says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8). This was typical of how seriously Abraham took the word of the Lord. That is what faith is all about.

That is exactly what our attitude ought to be as well. We need to have that kind of reverence for the Lord our God. The Lord has spoken in these "last days" to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). In this message, revealed in the New Testament, we find the revelation of God's will, and ought to have just as much respect for it as Abraham had for God's word to him.

Abraham's Guests

"Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day." (Genesis 18:1).

There were three that came to Abraham. He was very hospitable to them, offering them shelter and food (Genesis 18:1-8). The Lord and two angels are the guests, though it appears that Abraham does not know that at first (see Genesis 18:16,17; 22,23; 19:1). He is just being hospitable. The New Testament tells us to be likewise (Hebrews 13:2).

As the guests were eating they inquired about Abraham's wife, Sarah. They promised that by this time the following year, despite her extreme age, she would have a son. Sarah overheard, and laughed at such an unlikely event. But the Lord responded, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." (Genesis 18:14; see vss. 9-15).

We would all do well to always remember that question when we have doubts or are dismayed. "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

Abraham - The Lord's Confidant

The Lord had decided to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their extreme wickedness. Their evil had constantly challenged God, and they had despised the opportunities granted to them to repent. Time was up!

Abraham had pleased God. The Lord expresses confidence in Abraham; "...since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." (Genesis 18:18,19).

Today, you and I can also be "friends of God"! Jesus said, "You are My friends, if you do what I command you." (John 15:14). It worked for Abraham, and Jesus says it will work for us as well.

God - How Could You?

The Lord had made the coming destruction of Sodom known to Abraham. Abraham was flooded with dismay. "And Abraham came near and said, 'Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?'" (Genesis 18:23).

Abraham had relatives living there. Once he had saved the city from a foreign invader. Not everyone in Sodom were corrupt, were they? Abraham is very disturbed by this decision God had made.

The reason is that Abraham had always believed that God was just. But this did not seem just to Abraham... to "sweep away the righteous with the wicked." That does not seem fair to me either. But I know something Abraham does not know, at least not yet.

Abraham sums up his problem. He said, "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:24,25).

Ultimately, Abraham found out the truth (Genesis 18:25-33). God was no tyrant. He already knew there would be no righteous souls involved in the destruction. God would be just, and Sodom would be destroyed. The Lord would not treat the righteous and wicked alike. Abraham's problem had been that he had not known all the facts.

Sometimes it is the same way with us. We do not know all the facts, all the end results and we do not have access to all the important information. When we lack all the answers, we choose to live by faith. We do not have all the facts, but the Lord does. We trust in our God to do what is right as we trust in Him for victory. God makes no mistakes.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 12.4; April 2005

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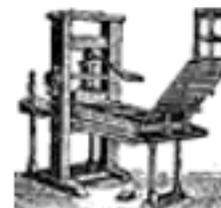


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Do Not Sell Your Birthright!

Genesis 25:29-34

When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. (Genesis 25:27). Genesis 25 records the birth of two boys to Isaac and Rebekka. From the very beginning, God said that their descendants would become two nations. From the start, it seemed as they were struggling against one another in fierce competition.

Esau's descendants did develop into the nation of Edom, while Jacob's, who's name was later changed to Israel, became the nation of Israel. The conflict between the brothers continued into adulthood, and ultimately, the nations that came from them were often at war with one another through the centuries (Numbers 20:14-21; 2 Samuel 8:13-14; 2 Kings 8:20-22).

Many centuries later, Edom was eventually destroyed by decree of God (Isaiah 34:5,6; 63:1; Obadiah 1-21; Malachi 1:3). It became a symbol of the earthly, non spiritual people of the world. People who care little for God and His will, but instead are carnal, greedy, and even treacherous are as the Edomites were, and as their ancestor, Esau, was. Even in the New Testament, Esau is looked upon as a profane person who foolishly squandered his life and the blessings of God, unable or unwilling to appreciate them or truly be thankful for them.

Esau's Birthright

In ancient times, the birthright was a very important and sacred thing. It belonged to the firstborn. The family name and titles were to pass along to the eldest son. He would also receive a chief portion of the inheritance. But it was more than just a title to the physical assets of a family. It was also a spiritual position, and in the case of the people of God, God would lead the family through patriarchs, or fathers (Hebrews 1:1-2). Additionally, in the special case of Esau and Jacob, that meant the one to whom belonged the birthright was the one through who the covenant promise made to their grandfather, Abraham, would be realized. Ultimately, the Messiah would come through the holder of the birthright and bless the nations of the earth. Esau was the firstborn, and the birthright was his. But like many, he failed to appreciate its value and sacredness.

"...When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, 'Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.' Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.' Esau said, 'Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?' And Jacob said, 'First swear to me'; so he swore to him, and sold

his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright." (Genesis 25:29-34).

There you have it. For a pot of stew, poor, hungry Esau sold his birthright. Such crass behavior would be a little like selling your wedding ring for a hamburger cause you had not eaten all day, only worse. It tells of Esau's attitude toward the things of God; His purpose and His will. It shows a lack of reverence and respect. It shows the same thing we see in too many people today when it comes to how little they regard the Lord.

Profanity

We do not usually use the word today for what it originally meant. Today, we immediately think of coarse, suggestive, lewd, vulgar language. Well, those things are profanities, but the definition of profane as used in Scripture is much wider than that. It means a lack of holiness. If you take something holy and good, and treat it with contempt, then you have profaned it. To treat the things of God as ordinary is to profane or despise them. It shows a lack of godliness.

And that is what the New Testament says about Esau. He was immoral, and lacked concern for pleasing God. His spiritual blessings and responsibilities meant nothing to him. The Lord tells us to be sure we are not like Esau in this, that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. (Hebrews 12:16).

But that was another time, another culture and another circumstance. We do not have the same traditions of birthright and our inheritance laws are quite different. No longer does the firstborn become spiritual head of the family. Is there still lessons and applications to be made from this? Definitely, there is!

The Value of Our Inheritance

The fact is, we do wait for a spiritual inheritance. And many think about it at about the same level as Esau thought about his. The lesson could not be more applicable if it came up and bit us on the nose. If we treat God's provisions, His commandments, His will, His purpose and His promises with less than the fervor and appreciation for them that we ought to have, He will hold us accountable for having profaned them.

If we just neglect the things having to do with our inheritance because the common things of this world are so important to us, as important as it was to Esau to have that bowl of stew, then we will be equally guilty before God. Well might we consider the rhetorical question of the Hebrew writer when he asked, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Hebrews 12:2). Just what do we think one deserves if he or she turns their back on God? How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:29-31).

Perhaps if we are under stress and pressure or duress, God will overlook our profaning our birthright. Don't count on it. There is nothing here worth belittling the value of our eternal blessings in Christ. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18).

The world rushes on today, giving little thought to God and His daily purpose for each of our lives. But we are children of God. Let us never forget, not for an hour, that God and His promises are holy. He expects our lives to reflect that awareness.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 10.7; July 2003

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Lessons from Joseph in Potiphar's House

Genesis 39:1-12

From the FOCUS MAGAZINE

One approach by which the Lord has chosen to instill within us a sense of being proper examples, is to provide us with examples. Examples are effective in inspiring us to make a change. For instance, if a friend has just lost forty pounds, one may reason, "If he could lose forty pounds, surely I can lose my twenty." Bible examples are not recorded for merely interesting reading - they are recorded for our learning (I Cor. 10:11). The story of Joseph in the house of Potiphar recorded in Gen. 39:1-12 provides some interesting lessons.

In verse 2, the text states, "And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. . . ." Though this has reference to becoming materially prosperous, Joseph was also, of course, successful spiritually. One of the lessons that can be learned as the story unfolds is that even a spiritually successful person is not exempt from temptation. Paul warns, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). We must always be on guard against the schemes of Satan.

"The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph ." (v. 5). A second lesson to be learned is that even those outside the Lord can be blessed by simply having some contact with one who is in the Lord. The effective personable personal worker can be instrumental in leading many to Christ. The believing wife who is married to an unbeliever can have a profound influence for good on her husband (I Pet. 3:1-2). Christians will often pray for non-Christians, even enemies. The influence of one who is in the Lord transcends the circle of Christians only.

Joseph was "handsome in form and appearance" (v. 6). A third lesson is traits that the world esteems can become stumbling blocks to those who possess them. For instance, the handsome young quarterback who is convinced that he is God's gift to womankind or the beautiful cheerleader who considers herself on a higher level than anyone else has a mixed-up view of priorities. It is obvious from the text that Joseph did not allow his good looks to cause him to stumble. If you are a person who has been blessed with an attractive appearance, thank God for it but don't stumble because of it. Always remain humble as our Lord was humble.

Godly Joseph queried, "...how then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (v. 9). A disservice to one's fellowman is foremost a disservice to God. When Nathan exposed David's sin with Bathsheba, the king's reply was, "I have sinned against the Lord" (II Sam. 12:13). Later, when David was reminiscing about his awful deed, he reflected, "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy

sight ..." (Ps. 51:4). Did David's sin not effect others - of course it did, in many ways, but he realized that most importantly he had sinned against his God. When the prodigal son finally returned to his good senses, he vowed, "I will get up and go to my father and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight" (Luke 15:18). Notice the order in which "heaven" and "in your sight" appear. What an important lesson to be remembered - when we sin against our fellowman, we first do a disservice to God.

Still, there's another lesson to be gleaned. The inspired record informs the reader that Potiphar's wife enticed Joseph not once, but rather "day after day" (v. 10). That means that she attempted to seduce him when he was weak as well as when he was strong. Some of life's strongest temptations are those which occur "day after day." To the dieter, it's not so much the one big meal that "does him in" as it is the day by day temptations for just one more bite. No wonder the AA organization strives to impress upon recovering alcoholics to live one day at a time - if they can get through one day without a drink, that's quite an accomplishment!

Finally, Joseph's response to his temptress' attempt to force herself upon him is impressive. One word describes that response - "fled" (v. 12). Joseph had a choice - he could either stay and attempt to justify himself that after all, it was her doings and he had no choice, or, flee. One must be willing to accept the consequences of one's own actions. It is never in order to say, "He/she made me do it." He may have contributed to the temptation but he didn't make you do anything. Some years back, a man in Newport Beach, CA ignored signs which stated, "Danger! No diving - shallow water." When he sustained serious spinal injuries after diving into the water, he sued the city for damages. We must be willing to accept the consequences of our own actions.

These are some lessons which can be learned from this story of Joseph in Potiphar's house. It appears, however, that the overriding lesson to be learned is moral purity. Honor, glory, and praise to God for giving us this example of moral purity for men of all generations.

By Larry Houchen
From Expository Files 6.9; September 1999

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Who Is The Lord That I Should Obey His Voice?

Exodus 5:1-4

When Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh, they had a message from God (Exodus 5:1). We often observe how foolish Pharaoh was for his response, which we will consider in a moment. It is true that his response was both foolish and arrogant. But before we consider it, try to put yourself in his place.

He was the great Pharaoh. His power was accepted far and wide. He was the most powerful man in the most powerful nation on the earth. He understood power in its earthly forms; armies and chariots and gold. If there had been a vast army of warriors standing behind Moses and Aaron, then perhaps his attitude toward them and their God would have been different.

But to Pharaoh, the very idea of obeying a God he had never seen, a God of lowly slaves of shepherd stock, was ludicrous! And this Moses was not a very convincing speaker either. What does a leader of sheep know about leading men? And his brother Aaron is only a slave and the son of a slave. Neither Moses nor Aaron possess any quality that would impress Pharaoh.

So, how can a God who would send a shepherd fugitive and a slave to deliver His warning be revered by the powerful Pharaoh?

The Request and the Response

"And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go.' Then they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.' But the king of Egypt said to them, 'Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!'" (Exodus 5:1-4).

The Pharaoh asks, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice..." he is not seeking information. He is simply ridiculing the whole notion that he would be even slightly inclined to listen to such a God or His spokesmen. He is far more concerned in getting the peoples' minds focused back on who is in charge and

that they better be getting busy.

Pharaoh's refusal to obey the Lord comes from His arrogance, and his arrogance came from his ignorance. By the way, one can often find the same thing today as the source of the problem when men and women live in rebellion against the Lord.

But for the sake of those who would honestly like to have Pharaoh's question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice" answered, let's provide some answers.

Almighty

"And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.'" (Revelation 19:6). The Greek word translated "almighty" in this verse is used some ten times with reference to God in the New Testament. It means to be "all powerful" or "omnipotent." God is able to do anything and everything that is consistent with His purpose, will, and righteous character. There are things that are impossible for men to do, but not God. Jesus said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God." (Luke 18:27).

God's divine power is seen in the creation. As we look into our world and the universe around it, we see the things God has made. Not only did He fashion and form it, He called the very molecules of matter and created the very forces of energy into existence from nothing (Romans 1:18-20). Perhaps had Pharaoh known and accepted that He was dealing with the Creator of all things, he would have had more respect for the words of Moses and Aaron. Certainly the same can be said for man today.

All Knowing

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ' My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure' (Isaiah 46:9,10).

There simply is nothing of which God is not aware. He knows from the beginning of a thing what the outcome will be. That which He proclaims to us concerning the past, present and future through His prophets is always accurate.

God had even told Moses and Aaron what Pharaoh's reaction would be to the request, and to each of the plagues that would follow. He knew the very heart of Pharaoh. Perhaps if Pharaoh had not thought of himself as so smart, and Aaron and Moses as so backwards, he would have had greater respect for the Lord's word. Again, bringing the point home to the twenty-first century, men today need to have a greater appreciation for the wisdom of God. To mock His word and refuse to be guided by it is no better than Pharaoh, and the outcome will be just as totally disastrous.

All Loving

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16). If we only knew that Jehovah God was "almighty" and "all

knowing" it would be enough to respect what He has spoken. But there is more reason to do so. God has blessings for all those who fear Him from whatever nation on all the face of the earth.

Peter came to recognize that God desires men and women of every nation to come to Him through His Son, Jesus. He said, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him." (Acts 10:34-35). What an honor! The almighty, all knowing one desires to bless me and will welcome me to Him if I will fear Him and do what is right! He will not cast me out just because I am not of a certain nation, or because I am poor, or rich, or tall, or short. He will protect me and guide me to eternal blessings in His Son. And while those in the world are concerned about war and terror and ozone depletion and disease, fearful that these things may bring joy to an end, while I, too, am concerned, I know they cannot take away my greatest joy and my best victory; the eternal one!

By Jon W. Quinn
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To Canaan's Land I'm On My Way

Exodus 6:6-8

The New Testament refers to the promises God has made to us as "precious and magnificent" (2 Peter 1:3). Other words associated with the promises of God are "glory" and "excellence" and "power."

Sometimes it is hard for us to understand just how precious and rich these promises are because of their spiritual nature. Jesus used many parables to illustrate the value of His kingdom. In doing so, Jesus used physical examples from our world to illustrate spiritual truths concerning the value of these Divine promises.

Another way that the Holy Spirit signifies the value of the promises of God is by drawing parallels with historical events. One prominent parallel used numerous times in the New Testament is that between God's people today and His people during the time of the Exodus. When we consider the promises of God made to the Israelites of Exodus and compare them to those made to Christians, we find similar parallels that ought to help us see the "preciousness" of God's promises to us.

I Will Bring You Out

"Say therefore to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD (Jehovah), and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians...' (Exodus 6:6a). The Children of Israel served in Egypt under the harshest of conditions. Their work was physically exhausting under normal circumstances, but it was made even more difficult by forcing the slaves to make the bricks without the use of straw.

One does not have to be loaded with back-breaking physical labor to be burdened though. Just as God promised to bring the Israelites out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, Jesus promises to give us rest from the mental, spiritual and emotional burdens of life (Matthew 11:28-30). He gives us the "peace of God" (Philippians 4:6,7). Why go through life burdened with despair when one can be free in knowing the truth (John 8:31, 32).

I Will Deliver You

"...and I will deliver you from their bondage." (Exodus 6:6b). The Egyptians were powerful. The Israelites did not have it within their power to break the shackles. Without God's help, they were doomed.

Today, as well, our only hope is in Christ Jesus. Sin is too cruel a taskmaster. It will take everything from us that is worth anything. To be sure, sin has its rewards, but nothing it offers is eternal except spiritual death (Romans 6:16; 23). Even as God promised to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, and just as Israel could not save themselves, God promises to deliver us from the curse of slavery to sin. God is able to deliver us from "the domain of darkness" (Colossians 1:13).

I Will Redeem You

"I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments." (Exodus 6:6c). To "redeem" something or someone is to buy them back. The Lord promised to "redeem" the children of Israel. He would do so "with an outstretched arm" which means by His own might. His redemption would also come by means of "great judgments" which probably refers to the ten plagues and the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

Today, we think of Christ Jesus and the spiritual redemption He makes possible. It is by His power, through His sacrifice on the cross, that we are redeemed from our sins (Romans 5:6 Ephesians 1:7). It is by His stripes we are healed. It was on the first day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection that sinners were first told to "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). It was by God's "outstretched arm" that three thousand souls were redeemed from sin that day (Acts 2:41). And, the day you responded in the same way, the Lord stretched out His arm once again to redeem; that time it was you being redeemed from your sin!

I Will Take You For My People

"Then I will take you for My people..." (Exodus 6:7a). God loved the people of Israel. He nurtured them and protected them. These were God's own people; His own possession. The Canaanites were living on the land that God had centuries before declared belonging to Abraham's descendants.

This is exactly what the Christian is today. The Lord reminds us that we are not our own but have "been bought with a price" (I Corinthians 6:19,20). As His people, we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (I Peter 2:9). It is time to live our lives with the confidence fitting those who praise God as our Eternal Father.

I Will Be Your God

"...and I will be your God..." (Exodus 6:7b). There had been many gods in Egypt. But there is only one true God. There are many gods today. There is greed and selfishness and pride. But still today, there is only one true God (1 Corinthians 8:5,6; Colossians 3:5). Not only does the Christian identify with God, but God also identifies with the Christian. When one of His people suffer, God shares in that grief. This is why Jesus accused Saul of "persecuting Me" when Saul was persecuting Christians (Acts 26:14,15). We need never face the problems of life alone (2 Corinthians 6:18)!

I Will Bring You to the Land

"And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..." (Exodus 6:8a). It was a long journey Israel had to make through the wilderness to get to the land of promise. It is certain that the nation could not survive the journey at all without the providence of God. What Israel had to do

was to respect and trust in God. They had to do the marching. They had to move at God's command.

The New Testament places us in the wilderness today. We are not at home in this world, but as we live by faith we are marching toward home (1 Peter 2:11). Though the journey sometimes seems filled with peril, we are confident because we know that God is with us. But like Israel of old, we must be willing to do the marching. We must move at God's command (Hebrews 3:14-19; 4:1,2).

I Will Give The Land to You For a Possession

"...and I will give it to you for a possession, I am the LORD." (Exodus 6:8b). The journey, though difficult at times, would not last forever. The goal was the land of Canaan, the land described as "flowing with milk and honey" which had been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This land was to be the inheritance of Abraham's descendants.

Though on a journey that is at times difficult, we understand that we have an inheritance waiting for us; a place more beautiful than Canaan of old. It is described in the pages of the Bible variously as a paradise garden, a city with streets of gold, an incorruptible crown of life and as a treasure. This will be home. There is no place like it. Let us never be fooled into abandoning the journey we must make to reach it (1 Peter 1:3-5).

By Jon W. Quinn
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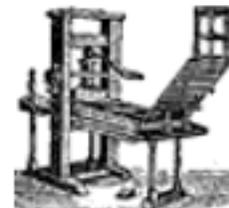


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Do You Remember? Will They Remember?

Exodus 12:26

For the first time in the history of the world a memorial was set up before the event that it commemorates occurred. In Exodus 12 Moses instructed the people concerning what the Lord God would do to the Egyptians, how they would celebrate a feast even as it was happening, and how they would keep this day of remembrance for all ages.

We know that the final great plague was the smiting of the firstborn of all Egypt. (vs. 12) God would bring this tenth and most horrible plague of judgment on the Egyptians to compel their hardhearted Pharaoh to let God's people go. This plague would come on every man and beast of the land, except those households who put the blood of a lamb on their door. Those houses, and only those houses, would the Lord "pass over." (vs. 13) In preparation for this night the people would have seven days of preparation. These days would begin and end with a holy convocation, (vs. 16) and the whole week would be marked by eating unleaven bread. (vs. 15) The people would forever commemorate deliverance from Egypt with a similar preparation and feast. (vss. 17-20)

For those who observed the first week of unleaven bread and Passover the meaning couldn't have been clearer. Moses himself instructed them on what to do and the need for it. (vss. 21-23) Having just seen the nine preceding plagues, the people would have been no doubt of God's power and intent to do just as was told them. For them to observe this week of preparation and feast was not simply a matter of national deliverance, but very literally a matter of life and death. For probably the only time in all of Israel's existence, there was universal obedience. "Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did." (vs. 28)

For this first generation the meaning, procedure, time, and purpose of the unleaven bread and Passover was clear. The events of that night were so important to them as a people and the night's results so stunning (before daybreak they were headed out of a century of slavery with all the spoils of Egypt (vss. 31-38)), they could never forget it. After this night they would never again see the place of their childhood. Never again would they be under the dominion of another. Never would they even be in the same country. No, they could not forget the feast of the Passover or its meaning. But would their children and their children's children remember?

From the very inception of the Passover, Moses recognized the propensity of men to forget across generations. Memories are not genetic. I do not have any recollection of things that did not happen to me. I know of the days before indoor plumbing only as history or by brief foray to the backwoods on

camping trips. My mother did not have indoor plumbing until she was in the 7th grade. She knows what this means by experience. I only know the story. I don't know if my children will know or care about the story or not. Similarly I never experienced plowing with mules, traveling by horse and buggy, log cabins, heating by wood burning stoves; hand pumped wells, or any number of other things that my forbearers knew. I know of these things only by history, but hopefully in knowing I will learn some lessons about hard work, hardship, privilege, blessings, appreciation, and the like. The aged are always sad when such accounts are forgotten for the lessons contained in them are lost on the young. If such is true in life lessons from family history, how much more sad if spiritual lessons from sacred history are forgotten?

Moses, knowing that just such a thing would happen to the children of Israel, said "[And it will come about when your children will say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?'](#)" (vs. 26) Even with an event as formative as the deliverance from Egypt, the story would have to be told again so that the next generations would know and remember it. Moses gave instruction to teach everyone who did not know: "you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" (vs. 27)

Is it the fault of the young that they do not know? Sometimes it is, for they have not taken the time to learn the lessons taught them by their ancestors. A wealth of wisdom of available to those who would search to find it - or even just soak it in from listening to their elders. At other times the fault lines in the older generations as well, for they may not have learned these things as they should so as to pass them on, or they may have not considered such lessons vital enough to make them part of the heritage of the next generations. The old warning was "We are only one generation away from complete apostasy." Why? Because one untaught (or uncaring) group was enough to forget all that had been passed down.

How quickly can things be forgotten? A new Egyptian king arose "who did not know Joseph." (Ex. 1:8) Can saving a country from famine and being the second man only to the king be forgotten? Of course it can. Just try to name the 44 U.S. Presidents. Or name even 10 Vice-Presidents. Anything can be forgotten if it is not taught - no matter how important or serious. Joshua knew that one day "children will ask their fathers what do these stones mean?" (Josh. 4:21) Do you know what they meant? They commemorated Israel coming across the Jordan on dry land. Who could forget something like that? Those that were not taught could.

Because of the continual danger of forgetting, we are told repeatedly of the need to teach others what we know and to keep learning ourselves. The great commission included the command to "teach them to observe all that I commanded you." (Matt. 28:20) Timothy the evangelist was told to "entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." (1 Tim. 2:20)

Man is too often distracted by what is new, present, exciting, "happening," or is currently considered "relevant." What was taught in the past is often not considered to be compelling enough to capture our attention. "We already know that!" is the bored man's cry. But we are not fed a good spiritual diet when we follow fads or the latest theories. The pagan spirit of "spend[ing]... time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21) has infected too many. What's "hot" and what's true are seldom the same. We must feed on "every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4) To

some that is stale bread, but to those who are striving to know and follow the will of God, it is the very "bread of life." The true is abiding. Truth is as old as first announcement and as new and fresh as its latest application.

So many often want a newer spicier dish, but the scriptures warn against this. "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'" (Jer. 6:16) We can rest assured that these people's children would not walk in it either. Such lack of knowledge and care is the ruin of the multitudes. But the Hebrew writer even warned those who were making some effort "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." (Heb. 2:1)

The need to be reminded and to remind others is an important and continuing need. If you cease to hear the old truths, how will you abide in them? If you cease to teach the old truths, how shall the young learn? If you cease to live the old truths, who will illustrate them to the world? "Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set." (Prov. 22:28) Remember where God has placed those landmarks - and teach your children that they might always find them as well.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 7.10; October 2000

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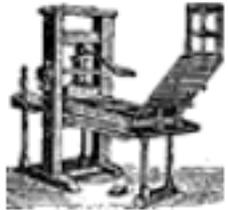
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

All that the Lord Has Spoken We Will Do

Exodus 19:1-8

The Lord was ready to allow Israel to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. God is going to bind Himself to certain promises that He would make to Israel. Israel was going to bind themselves to certain obligations unto God. That is how a covenant, or contract, works. This covenant was inaugurated by word of mouth (today we call this a "verbal contract") and then was written down.

The Scriptures say, "In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD." (Exodus 19:1-8)

The Lord reminded Israel of certain truths. Though this ancient covenant has been replaced by a new and better covenant made through the blood of Christ, we do find many similarities. Consider them:

"I Bore You On Eagles' Wings" (v.4)

A rather poetic and picturesque description of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt is employed by the Lord. It vividly portrays God's miraculous provision for His people.

Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage, an enslavement of God's people that had taken place sometime after Jacob's move to Egypt during the days of Joseph 430 years before.

We also are delivered from bondage; enslavement to the cruelest taskmaster of all; sin (John 8:33-34).

God freed us by redeeming us from our former master. Redemption means deliverance from some evil by payment of a price. That price was paid by the love of God at the cross (1 Peter 1:18-19). This was

the price of our ransom (1 Timothy 2:6). Without this gift from God, we would have suffered eternal, spiritual death. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23). But now, our prospects are bright with hope as we journey in the wilderness, free at last, and heading for home. "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). For those who experience the victory of faith, it is like being delivered from sin by our God on "eagles' wings." Now, notice some further similarities.

"If You Will Indeed Obey My Voice" (v. 5)

Israel had to obey God to be delivered as well as to remain free. If they had not kept the Passover they would have suffered the tenth plague. If they had not left Egypt, they would have remained slaves. If they had not crossed the Red Sea, they would have been recaptured or slain.

We must obey God to be delivered and to remain free. Salvation begins with the obedience of faith; that is, obedience from the heart. "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Salvation continues with a walk of faithful obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9; Philippians 2:12).

"You Shall Be My Own Possession" (v. 5)

Israel became God's special treasure (Isaiah 43:1-4). They were important to Him as a nation as well as individuals. That is true with us today as well. God has grand plans for us, and they begin today. The Lord seeks precious friendship with us so that He might bless us as He is glorified (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9,10). We have been purchased and now it is our privilege to bring God honor and be zealous for good works which He has prepared for us to do.

"Kingdom of Priests" and a "Holy Nation" (v. 6)

Israel was God's kingdom with priest and Christians are God's kingdom of priests. We are the spiritual kingdom of Christ (Revelation 1:6; 5:10) and function as, among other things, its priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9).

Israel was also God's holy nation. (Leviticus 19:2). Today, Christians are to be a holy nation. (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Peter 1:15-16). This means we are to be set apart from the world in our conduct. Our purpose, our standard and our worship.

And Moses Brought Back the Words of the People to the Lord (v. 8)

Israel and God had a mediator between them in Moses. We also have one between ourselves and God; Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). He seeks to bring us together. He is an improvement over Moses in several ways. He is without sin. He identifies perfectly with both God and man. He understands both sides intimately and personally (Philippians 2:5-11).

Conclusion

God has allowed us to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. When Israel of old was offered her privilege of having such a relationship with God, "All the people answered together and said, "All that

the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD." (Exodus 19:8). So let us also say together: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" God will bless our lives as He has promised, if we will obey Him as we have promised.

"All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD." (Exodus 19:8)

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 12.5; May 2005

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The Calf of Gold

Exodus 32

In Exodus 32 we find recorded an incident that holds many important lessons for us today. In fact, the New testament refers to the incident there with admonition not to allow similar things to deter us today from serving God faithfully. Consider the incident itself, and then we'll look at some points to be made from it.

Aaron And The Golden Calf (Ex. 32)

Moses had delayed coming down from the mountain, at least in the peoples' view (Exodus 32:1). They had been led to Mount Sinai by Moses, and had witnessed powerful signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea. God was truly with them. But they could not see Him. They had seen abundant evidence of His power and might, but they could not see Him. Could the plagues in Egypt be explained naturally? Perhaps the splitting of the Sea to allow them safe passage was the result of tidal influences. Or maybe the gods of the Egyptians were angry with them and these things were their punishment. At least one could actually see the idols of the Egyptians, but not so with the God of Moses. Sure, He had also been the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That had not kept them from becoming slaves.

For whatever foolish reasons, the people gathered together and asked Aaron to "make us gods." Now Aaron was much too cautious for that! He collected gold from the people and fashioned a calf (Exodus 32:2-4). Then Aaron built an altar to the calf and proclaimed a feast "to the Lord" (Exodus 32:5). The actual Hebrew word Aaron used for "Lord" was "Jehovah". You see, Aaron thought it best to continue to serve Jehovah God Almighty, but was willing to make a golden calf to represent Him because of the people's desire.

God informed Moses that the people were sinning. Moses interceded for them, pleading for God's mercy, even stating his own willingness to die with them (vss. 7-14). Then, Moses returned, broke the tablets of stone containing the law, and destroyed the calf (vss. 15-20). After this, Moses confronted Aaron. Aaron tried to put the blame on the people (Exodus 32:21-24). In the following mayhem, 3000 were slain (vs. 28).

Note Moses' later recollection of this event: "I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands and smashed them before your eyes. I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing

what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also. The LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time. I took your sinful thing, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain.” (Deuteronomy 9:17-21).

Beware Leaders Who Forget God

Leaders of God's people can succumb to temptation. Only faith in God is a sure thing. Our fellow human beings will sometimes fall short, even the best of us.

There are many religious leaders in America leading in all kinds of different directions. In Aaron's day, there was one right response to what the people had requested. It was not to make gods for them to worship. It was not even to make one idol of God and say it represented Jehovah. It was to teach the will of God concerning the matter. It was to teach God's will even if people did not like it or refused to listen. It was to teach God's commandments even if that meant becoming unpopular. It was to teach God's truth even at risk of harm or death. It is the same way today. “solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Paul wrote, “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” and then refers to God as “ and then speaks of God as “...King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.” (1 Timothy: 1:5;17) We simply cannot picture God, and to try to visually represent Him by things of this world is insulting to His eternal glory. So, honor men and women of righteousness for their faith, love and courage, but let your first love and loyalty be to the Lord, and if a good person goes bad, don't follow them; don't let it hurt your faith.

God Demands Obedience

That is true today as well. We have no business calling Jesus “Lord” if we will not obey Him (Luke 6:46). Remember that confession you made at the beginning of your discipleship: “I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

God is the Creator of the universe. He is Almighty and we must not be so arrogant as His creatures to dismiss His commandments as unimportant. Most of the world seem to have such a casual attitude toward God's commandments. So many think the Lord may be disobeyed without consequence. How sad. There is not an iota of Biblical evidence that one may live out his or her life minimizing the commandments of God and “going with the flow” of society and still be rewarded with heaven one day (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 John 3:2-3; 5:3-4; Revelation 22:14-15).

Idolatry Today

Idolatry can be a problem for God's people today. Craving evil things is a form of idolatry. In fact, Paul tells us to learn from the sad example of what Aaron and the people did (1 Corinthians 10:6-7;11). We learn that making money and things more important in our lives than walking with God is idolatry (Colossians 3:3-7). So, as John puts it, there is still the need to beware of idolatry: "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

One final point; We recall how Moses plead unto God not to destroy the people for their sin. We also have one who makes intercession for us today. As good as Moses was, we have an even better intercessor. It is our Lord and King; High Priest and Savior; Jesus (Hebrews 7:22-25).

By Jon W. Quinn

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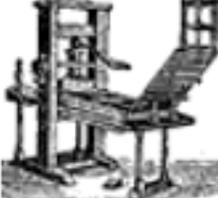
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Keeping What Is Holy, Holy

Leviticus 10

Is God just? Does He randomly dole out punishment and reward on a whim? Why does it sometimes seem to us that He reacts rather severely towards some, while overlooking the faults of others?

To many, the names Nadab and Abihu are synonymous with taking liberty in worship - the presumption that one can approach God in whatever means he chooses and still please God. Though some have struggled to circumvent this principle by suggesting drunkenness was the basis of their sin (Leviticus 10:9), or that they died because they had entered the holiest place behind the veil, being "before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:1-2), yet the Bible always associates the death of these two priests with their offering "unauthorized fire" (Numbers 3:4; 26:61). Certainly these brothers stand as an example to all who doubt the necessity of having authority for what we do in worship to God. Yet few realize that not only had Nadab and Abihu failed to keep the Lord's ordinance, but their brothers and father did as well. In the very same chapter which introduces the sin and punishment of Nadab and Abihu we also find Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar refusing to eat the sin offering as the Lord commanded - yet they did so without repercussion from God.

So the question remains: Is God just when He punishes some for disobedience, yet allows others to escape His wrath? The key to this seeming contradiction in God's judgment is seen in the center of the chapter:

"You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses." (Leviticus 10:10-11)

Leviticus 10 - Keeping What Is Holy, Holy

The overriding theme of this chapter, as well as the major thrust of the book of Leviticus, has to do with keeping that which is holy separate from that which is common. Nadab and Abihu sinned in their failure to distinguish between what was holy and what was profane...

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out

from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

(Leviticus 10:1-3)

The priest-brothers were engaging in activities suitable for priests. The offering of incense was restricted to the Levitical priesthood, namely Aaron and his sons (Numbers 16). They were the right people, doing the right thing. But something about their offering was amiss. The inspired writer says they offered "unauthorized fire". Some translations call it "strange fire". The text reveals that the fire was not what God had commanded. Bible class teachers and preachers have sometimes stated that the fire they put in their censers was not from the altar, and therefore "strange" (Leviticus 6:9). Yet it could be that it was the incense that they set on fire that was amiss and unauthorized (Exodus 30:9). The Lord had been very specific regarding the recipe for acceptable incense:

The LORD said to Moses, "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the LORD. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people."

(Exodus 30:34-38)

Just as it would be wrong for the people to make incense for themselves according to the formula for this holy fragrance, it would be wrong to take a common perfume and offer it as incense before the Lord.

The fact of the matter remains. These priests had attempted to offer to God that which was unauthorized, unholy. Nadab and Abihu were guilty of failure to sanctify God by rendering to Him what was holy. They had glorified themselves by approaching God by their own design rather than by the Lord's ordinance. Therefore the Lord punished them as an example to all.

Furthermore, as the chapter progresses, Moses forbade Aaron and his living sons from defiling themselves for the dead. They had been made holy with the anointing oil of the priesthood and had duties to perform as priests (Exodus 30:30). Moses called Levites (who were not anointed priests) to dispose of the bodies.

And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of

meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

(Leviticus 10:4-7)

Evidently, Nadab and Abihu had died in front of the sanctuary, where these non-priests could retrieve the bodies. Had they entered the holiest place, as some have conjectured, their bodies would have been behind the veil, beyond which only the high priest had authority to enter. It was forbidden for Aaron, the high priest, to defile himself for a dead body (Leviticus 21:10-12), and while other priests could ordinarily make himself unclean in mourning for the dead of his closest relatives (Leviticus 21:1-6), Moses did not allow it at this time. They had been anointed as holy to the Lord, and were not permitted to act commonly. Having just witnessed the consequences of disobedience in this regard, the priests obeyed.

God spoke to Aaron, admonishing him to take his position seriously, for the priests had been given charge to distinguish between the holy and the common, and to teach such distinction to all Israel:

And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses."

(Leviticus 10:8-11)

Rather than this injunction suggesting that Aaron's disobedient sons were drunken delinquents, it offered application to the priests who remained: "Let nothing cloud your mind so that you fail to distinguish between what is holy and what is common." The essence of Nadab's and Abihu's sin was a failure to make this distinction. Therefore, this prohibition against drinking wine was not a reaction to their drunkenness, but to their poor judgment. As has been demonstrated and documented throughout the course of history, consuming alcohol impairs judgment and breaks down inhibitions. God's priests are to be of sober mind and sound judgment. The Lord aptly warned Aaron to judge rightly.

Though the day was darkened by the events which had transpired, Aaron and his sons still had their priestly obligations to perform. Moses reminded them of this...

Moses spoke to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his surviving sons: "Take the grain offering that is left of the LORD's food offerings, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the LORD's food offerings, for so I am commanded. But the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed you shall eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you, for they are given as your due and your sons' due from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. The thigh that is contributed and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the food offerings of the fat pieces to wave for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be yours and your sons' with you as a due forever, as the LORD has

commanded."

(Leviticus 10:12-15)

Part of God's provision for the priests was in the sacrifices which were offered by the people of Israel. The grain offering was to be eaten in a holy place (Leviticus 2:3, 10; 6:16). Wave and heave offerings were for the priest and his family (Numbers 18:17-19). Only those who were set apart for this service were to partake of this holy food. Only the holy could partake of the holy.

But Moses' anger was stirred when he discovered that Aaron and his sons had not partaken of the sacrifices which had been offered...

Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned up! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." And Aaron said to Moses, "Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and yet such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?" And when Moses heard that, he approved.

(Leviticus 10:16-20)

Though it was part of the priest's duty to make sacrifices for the people and to eat of them himself, Aaron and his sons had refused from partaking of this holy food, though it was appointed for them to do so. Why did God not strike them down as He had Nadab and Abihu?

The answer, I believe, lies in Aaron's defense before his brother. Considering the events of the day, had the priests eaten of the sacrifices, they would have done so with an improper attitude, and worshiped in vain. The New Covenant Scriptures shed some light on this principle:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

(1 Corinthians 11:26-29)

In eating of the sacrifices offered to God, priests proclaim God's holiness, since they alone can eat of this sanctified meat. However, due to the circumstances surrounding this appropriated meal, they could not do so in the proper mindset. Eating of the sacrifice without discerning its meaning would have brought judgment on the surviving priests rather than justification.

Moses understood and approved of his brother's decision. We can understand why God punished Nadab and Abihu while excusing Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar. They would have been guilty had they gone ahead and partaken of the sacrifice in an unworthy manner. Therefore it was right for them to abstain.

Let Us Keep What Is Holy, Holy

We, too, may find ourselves in similar situations at times. Perhaps we will be tempted to worship God according to our design and innovation rather than according to His authority. Many have done so, adding mechanical instruments of music to the simple command to sing praises to God, altering the day, manner, or elements of the Lord's Supper, engaging in the appearance of idolatry with icons, beads, and special vestments. From Nadab and Abihu we must learn to approach God only as He has ordained - for He is holy.

Yet, though we may not change the outward nature of our worship to God, we may fail to inwardly regard the significance of our actions. When we fail to focus on prayer when led by a brother in the assembly, does the Lord approve? When we fail to consider the words of the songs we sing to God and each other, does the Lord approve? When we give grudgingly or out of a sense of obligation and duty, does the Lord approve? When we fail to remember Christ's death or discern the Lord's body, does the Lord approve? We may sometimes be guilty of placing more emphasis on the action than the attitude. While many of us would (like Moses) ask why one failed to carry out God's command if we observed some not singing, not praying, not giving, or (more likely) not participating in the Lord's Supper, we would do well to look within ourselves and make sure we are doing these things with a clear conscience and worshipful spirit.

We must, as Aaron and his sons realized, distinguish between the holy and the common, both in manner and method, in attitude and action, in spirit and in truth.

By Stuart N. Tullis
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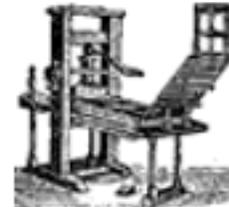


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Lord Bless and Keep You (Numbers 6:22-27)

God had promised Israel during Moses' leadership that one day He would raise up another leader like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). This promise is announced as fulfilled in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus (Acts 3:18-26). Certainly Jesus is like Moses in many respects; for example, as Moses led people out of bondage in Egypt so also Christ Jesus frees us from bondage to sin. Also, Moses chose to leave the luxury of Pharaoh's palace and suffer hardship with his people, and Jesus chose to leave heaven and dwell on earth as a man.

But it is important to understand that while there are similarities, there are also great differences. The Book of Hebrews emphasizes some of these differences such as the fact that Moses was God's servant but Jesus is God's Son (Hebrews 3:1-6). [<See the excellent article "Consider Him" on this passage in this issue by my co-editor, Warren Berkley>.](#)

As our text we will consider an event in the life of Moses when the Lord spoke to him and told him to give Aaron, the high priest, some instructions. The text is found in Numbers 6:22-27:

["Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:](#)

[The Lord bless you, and keep you;](#)

[The Lord make His face shine on you,](#)

[And be gracious to you;](#)

[The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,](#)

[And give you peace."](#)

[So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I shall bless them."](#)

According to Jewish writings, this benediction was quoted daily in the temple as well as in the synagogues. The words of this blessing, given through the mediator Moses, become even richer when we consider them in relationship to our new mediator and leader like Moses, that being Jesus Christ. In the light of the new covenant, which is a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 8:6) we, as Christians, have much to rejoice about!

[The Lord's Blessing](#)

["The Lord bless you..."](#) (Numbers 6:24a). The blessings of God, spiritual and physical, ought never to be taken for granted. This benediction recognizes the source of all good things as being God (cf. James 1:17). No doubt the people under Moses' leadership thought of the blessings God had promised them if

they would continue to obey Him faithfully. He had promised that "if you will diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments..." that "... all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you." (Deuteronomy 28:1,2). Then the blessings are described. They would be blessed in city and country; in their offspring and the offspring of their flocks and crops and in protection from their enemies. The Lord would make them "abound in prosperity" (Deuteronomy 28:3-14).

Jesus' blessings for us today emphasize the spiritual rather than the physical. While He gives certain assurances in the physical realm, His sacrifice on the cross had to do with restoring us to spiritual life and giving us spiritual bread and water so we need never hunger or thirst again (John 6:27-35). Jesus makes a point that the world often overlooks. He could have made it His business to provide physical blessings the way Moses had (vs 31, 32) but Jesus was providing something better. This is because those who emphasize their physical needs and desires over their spiritual needs will only grow hungry again and ultimately perish whether they have something to eat or not. But those who partake of the bread of life will live forever.

The Lord's Keeping

"...and keep you." (Numbers 6:24b). The idea of "keep you" is divine protection. In Moses' time, this would refer to protection from hostile invasions and drought and things chiefly of a physical nature. However, again the emphasis shifts in the New Testament and deals more with spiritual protection. One good example of this is the figure of speech that Jesus uses to describe His relationship with His disciples. He is the "Good Shepherd" and we are His sheep. He knows His own, and His own know Him. He lays down His life for his sheep so that they may be protected from the robber or the wolf. His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, and as long as they do, He keeps them safe promising them eternal life (John 10:1-16; 27,28).

The Lord's Shining Face

"The Lord make His face shine upon you..." (Numbers 6:25a). The Lord's face is depicted as shining in several places in the Bible. It shines with a tremendous radiant glory, instilling awe in His creatures. We recall how even Moses' face once shined after communicating with the Lord.

However, there is more to it than that. The blessing asks the Lord to make His face "shine upon you." This suggests a pleasure or warmth of association with the Lord. Awareness of God's presence brings comfort to the faithful.

We also recall how Jesus was transfigured in the New Testament. Peter, James and John were awe-struck when they beheld the Lord. The Bible says, "And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." (Matthew 17:2). Paul, in encouraging faithful living on the part of Christians and a warning against being lulled back into the world, later wrote "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:14).

The Lord's Graciousness

"...And be gracious to you;" (Numbers 6:25b).

Certainly God favored the faithful of Moses' era with mercy and blessings. Our God is a God happy to give good things to His children. The nation of Israel never did better than during those times when it

was loyal to God. Neither will our own nation, and the same thing applies to individuals.

The supreme example of God's graciousness is not found in the sun or rain or crops or physical prosperity. We thank God for these things; but as wonderful as they are they pale when compared to the favor God bestows upon us through His Son Jesus. It is this inner wealth that is most important; the blessings of spirit which God abundantly gives. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

The Lord's Countenance

"The Lord lift up His countenance upon you..." (Numbers 6:26a). This phrase suggests the opposite of "hiding His face from you" which the Bible also uses (Isaiah 54:6). It suggests His interest as well as His readiness to help. It is a look of approval that the Lord gives to those who live by faith.

The Lord watches His people today as well. Again, it is a look of approval that the Lord gives His people. He knows what we endure for His namesake. He will not forget our work and love (Hebrews 6:10) and will one day welcome the faithful home with the words; "Well done!" It is a wonderful thing to know that the Lord approves of the way we are using our talents, opportunities and lives.

The Lord's Peace

"...And give you peace." (Numbers 6:26b). This peace denotes stability and calmness. Isaiah wrote, "The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in Thee. Trust in the Lord forever, for in God, the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock." (Isaiah 26:3,4).

Jesus is our Rock, and gives peace as well. A solid foundation is needed for stability, and there is none sounder than that of the Living Word of God. Jesus promises peace, and since He is the Prince of Peace we can be sure of His promise. In this mad, crazy world, we are sorely in need of this calm assurance and peaceful confidence. Your friends, family and neighbors need it as well. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6,7).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 11.8; August, 2004

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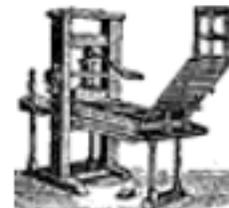


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How To Claim Victory Through Faith

Numbers 13; 14

The writer of the book of Hebrews has much to say about faith. He talks of the necessity of faith in pleasing God (Hebrews 11:6), but we need to understand that he is not talking about just any kind of faith. It must be an enduring faith. The Scriptures say, "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised." (Hebrews 10:36). This helps us to understand what kind of faith the Hebrew writer is talking about in chapter eleven. "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

To illustrate inadequate faith, the Hebrew writer appeals to the example of the unbelieving Israelites who were journeying in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. They were on their way to "the promised land", which in their case was the land of Canaan. God had promised Abraham centuries before to give this land to his descendants. The problem was that the descendants did not have Abraham's faith. They grumbled, complained and rebelled. In Hebrews chapters three and four the writer discusses how these people had failed to enter into Canaan because of their unbelief. The point made is that we, like they, could fail to enter heaven. It simply is not enough to start the journey; we must endure to the finish if we are to find our way to the better place that God has prepared.

Let us turn our attention now to the Old Testament record of this period in Israel's history, and draw out some needed lessons from it which apply so well to our own journey as disciples of Jesus, just as the New Testament encourages us to do (I Corinthians 10:1-13). We will find our text in Numbers chapters thirteen and fourteen.

GOD WILL GIVE THE FAITHFUL EXACTLY WHAT HE HAS PROMISED

"Thus they told him and said, 'We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly flows with milk and honey...' (Numbers 13:27). It was from the burning bush that God had called Moses to lead His people to Canaan. It was then that the Lord described to Moses the land as "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8). The first affirmation that these words were true was the report of the spies who said that it was so.

It is important to know what God has promised to those who live by faith. Sometimes people accuse

God foolishly because some tragedy strikes them and they think that God has failed them. But the fact is that God has never promised that tragedy in this life will not afflict the faithful. The promise is that when tragedy strikes, we will be better equipped to deal with it (Philippians 4:4-14).

Also, we need not fear that heaven will be any less than what the Scriptures of God promise us that it is. It is then that God promises to wipe away every tear. It is then, as we enter heaven's gates, that we will echo the words of the spies, "It certainly flows with milk and honey."

THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT GOD'S PROMISES ARE REAL

"...they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land" (Numbers 13:26). It was not as if the people only had the spies' testimony about the richness of the land. The spies had brought back with them examples of the fruit grown in Canaan. The examples brought back served to confirm that everything was indeed just as the spies had said and as the Lord had promised.

Again, we see a parallel to our own journeys as Christians. We have not yet seen heaven, yet we have tasted of its goodness. It is by personal experience that those who truly live by faith are able to confirm "peace which passes understanding."

On the other hand, the things the Bible says about the consequences of sin is also confirmed. Sin has not made the world a better place. Hatred, pride, envy, scorn and cruelty abound among those who know not God (and this includes religious people as well as the irreligious). All this is evidence that God's word is true.

THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

"Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.'" (Numbers 13:30). The spies gave their opinions about the matter. Ten of the twelve were convinced that if they went in to take the land God had promised them that they would fail. They advised doing nothing in that regard, and to search for an alternate course of action. Caleb (and Joshua) insisted that the time to act was now. There ought not to be any reason to doubt. God was with them. A debate ensued as to whether their action of obedience could possibly be successful. Two men of faith stood against the other ten spies insisting that with God victory was assured, but only if they acted. Unfortunately, the majority of the people were swayed by the doubters.

Likewise, the time for action is now with reference to our discipleship. How often that which needs to be done today never gets done because we put it off until "tomorrow." Its not enough to know the right thing to do; we must do it. Are we among the doubters, scoffers and doomsayers? Or are we among those who say, "We shall surely overcome it."

UNBELIEF IS A TRAGEDY

"And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes..." (Numbers 14:6). The people had determined to appoint another leader in Moses' place and return to Egypt. The tearing of one's garment signaled deep distress and sorrow. Joshua and Caleb knew that to rebel against God would bring disaster. Had these people forgotten so quickly the Lord's mighty deliverance at the Red Sea? Could they not remember how the Lord had sustained them and provided for them in the wilderness with food to eat and water to drink?

Likewise, today, it is a shameful thing when the people of God fail to believe. To hold back in fear does not speak well of one's faith. How much more could be accomplished in a disciple's lifetime if he or she has the spirit of Joshua and Caleb rather than the ten spies who doubted. What a waste to fail to act upon our faith in Heaven's Redeemer!

TRUE FAITH BRINGS ABIDING CONFIDENCE

"If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us - a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord... the Lord is with us, do not fear them." (Numbers 14:8,9). Faith does not deny that there are difficulties to face. Rather, it expresses confidence in victory through the power of God in spite of the difficulties. It holds that there is nothing too difficult for God.

The problem with many today is that they often leave God out of the picture. Impossible things will always remain impossible apart from God. Overcoming is possible only "through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

FAITH FOLLOWS GOD IN EVERYTHING

"But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it." (Numbers 14:24). Though most of that generation failed to enter the land, Caleb (and Joshua) survived the wilderness and accomplished the crossing of the Jordan River to inherit the land along with the children of the present generation. The reason the Lord allowed this was because of the fullness of Caleb's faith. He would not allow the doubts of others to cloud his perspective, and nor should we today.

Make no mistake about it; if the world has its way it will destroy your faith and confidence. It will seek to persuade you not to trust in Jesus as fully as you ought. It will weaken you and even destroy you if you let it. When the world insists that you not be so fully committed to King Jesus, then it is time to say "no" to the world.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 2.12; December 1995

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Saved Only By The Glory Of The Lord **(Numbers 14:10)**

Today we count as heroes timeless men of faith like Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb. Just think of all the baby boys that have been named in their honor and carry these dignified names. While we venerate them, we often forget how hated they were by the popular mind in their own day.

In Numb. 13:2-16 Moses called for each tribe of Israel to send one of their leaders into the promised land to spy it out. They were to report back what people and resources and defenses were there. (13:17-20) These men surveyed the land for 40 days from top to bottom. (13:21-26) These leaders/spies came back and reported the facts about the land. They all reported the great fertility of the land and the strength of its inhabitants. With these facts there was no dispute, but most of the spies drew the wrong conclusion because they had no faith. They reported that the land was too much to take and the people became quite upset. Here we see an illustration of a truth that is often hard and disheartening to learn: that being a leader of God's people and being faithful to God is not always the same thing.

Then Caleb "quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.'" (13:30) The man of faith took the position that if God promised it to them, they should "BY ALL MEANS GO." For the man of faith the potential opposition of the inhabitants was nothing compared to what God said that He would do. But the other spies thought only from a worldly perspective and contradicted Caleb and misled the people saying that the cities were too big and strong to take. The people were so firmly convinced of the worldly conclusions of faithless men that "the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night." (14:1) How different the the history of this generation would have been had they taken to heart the word of God and the encouragements of faithful men. But they received and meditated on the words of the faithless.

The night of weeping led to a morning of grumbling. (14:2,3) They complained even of their deliverance from slavery because they contended it would only end in their death in the desert. Total lack of faith in God's purposes led them to revolution against God's appointed leaders. "So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'" (14:4)

At this point the few godly men among them did all they could to stop the rebellion. Even if vastly outnumbered, and that is often the case, godly men must stand firm. Moses and Aaron fell on their face in humility toward God and horror at the people's rebellion. (14:5) Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in

great mourning and tried to convince the people to have confidence in the promises of God. "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us--a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." (14:8,9) They implored the people saying that they could have all the blessings that God offered if they would continue in His divine favor. 'Don't rebel and live so that they Lord is pleased with you, and all will go well with you,' they preached.

This show of humility, reliance on God and call to faithfully fulfill God's plan was met with even more belligerence. "But all the congregation said to stone them with stones." (14:10a) They were enraged that any would stand in the way of their rebellious plans and moved to carry out all the violence that a revolution brings, in spite of the faithful who entreated them to follow God's way. They were ready to kill. When you reject God's purpose and promises so completely that you are ready to go back to the world instead of pressing on in faith, you will truly hate those who stand in your way by teaching God's word.

The only thing that saved Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb that day was direct divine intervention. In our minds we can see the few faithful standing before the tabernacle facing the menacing crowd led by those with rocks. As they closed in, God showed which side He was on. "Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel." (14:10b) The light of God shining before them quieted the crowd that day and humbled them, at least for a time.

On this occasion God made a demonstration to show which side He was on. Everyone should have already known that based on what His word. We will not have miraculous demonstrations to tell us which side God approves and which He does not, but we do have His word. That will have to be enough for us. We must learn our lesson from God's past speaking and appearing and apply it without being shown miraculously on every occasion.

But there are some who are so hardened in worldliness that even a glorious manifestation of God's power will not stop them. In Acts 7 Stephen gave the Jews a recounting of their rebellions even as "all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel." (Acts 6:15) That worldly crew resisted both the word and the miracle and stoned Stephen. If you will reject the word you'll reject a miracle also.

Be careful how you treat God's word and those who faithfully proclaim it. Don't wait for extraordinary evidence before you follow it. If you are not prepared to do what God has clearly said you'd probably reject a divine sign, even if He were inclined to give one. Don't count on God going to extraordinary measures to stop or instruct you. He's already told you. So be saved by the faithful word that you already have.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 11.3, March, 2004

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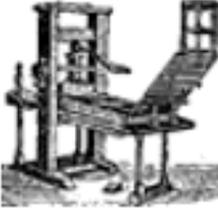
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The Foolishness of Presumption

Numbers 14:39-45

Men and women who think themselves wise will often in their own conceit presume things that bring ruin. Presumption is born of pride. Concerning our lives and our service to God, many religious leaders in their arrogance have presumed things about God which may or not be true. If they like something, they presume God likes it. For example, many have assumed that God is infatuated with the pomp of ornate religious rituals which take place in beautiful cathedrals, and so spend huge sums of money and energy in providing these things. "We desire it" they say, "so certainly God does too." When asked for evidence that God desires such, the response is something like, "We have worked so hard on it and are so dedicated, He's just got to like it."

The truly wise do not presume such things. They accept God at His word and with humility and reverence accept what He has revealed. They give Him that which He has authorized. They refrain from serving Him with those things which are of human design and instead look at what is ordained in the Scriptures of God. No amount of human dedication, talent or effort can make a thing acceptable unto God if He has not authorized it to begin with (II John 9; Colossians 2:20-23; I Corinthians 4:6; Matthew 15:8,9).

A Case in Point

"And when Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, 'Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised.' But Moses said, 'Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? Do not go up lest you be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you.' But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah." (Numbers 14:39-45).

Background Information

"So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'" (Numbers 14:4). In spite of the constant reminders of God's care for them, these people lacked confidence in Him. They had escaped terrible bondage in Egypt and had witnessed God's power at the Red Sea. They had survived the wilderness journey through God providing them with food from heaven and water from the rocks. The cloud and pillar of fire had led them to the borderlands of Canaan.

But they had complained and grumbled almost constantly. They had made a calf of gold and engaged in idolatry. They had spoken against Moses. And most recently, they had sent spies into Canaan and received the spies' report. They were told that Canaan was everything it had been promised to be. But ten of the twelve spies also expressed doubt as to whether Israel could inhabit the land. The Canaanites were too strong, they insisted.

Because of this lack of trust in God who certainly had proven Himself worthy of better than that, God decreed that this generation would not be permitted to enter the land, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who had encouraged the people to trust in the LORD. All the others, from twenty years and upwards, would die in the wilderness. Following this, which would take forty years, the new generation would enter in and possess the promised land (Numbers 14:20-35).

The Presumption

"And when Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, 'Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised.'" (Numbers 14:39,40). It is interesting that the people only realized how valuable the blessings of the promised land were after they had forfeited God's promise. It is so typical that we often "do not miss the water until the well runs dry." We take so many things for granted when we ought to be thanking God each day for what we have in our nation.

Notice how these people, because of their newfound desire to possess the land of Canaan, began to reason and presume their way to disaster:

1) "Here we are": It was as if they were saying that since God had gotten them this far, they were free to do as they pleased. It is with every confidence that we can point to past blessings and providence in our lives. The Christian can credit God for his salvation from past sin. God's grace is wonderful, but we must not be tempted to think that we may sin with impunity "that grace may abound" (Romans 6:1,2). Though favored in the past, if we sin against God in the present we will forfeit His promise to us as well.

2) "We have indeed sinned": Confession of sin is good. But it will do no good to confess sin with the purpose in mind of immediately sinning again. Confession without submission is empty and worthless. It was a sin for these people to seek to possess Canaan after God had decreed that their generation would not possess it. No amount of confessing past wrongs allows us to commit a sin in the present without guilt. This confession was not from a contrite heart before God but rather a desperate gambit to try

anything to recover what they had lost.

3) "But we will go up": In spite of the LORD'S words to the contrary, these people insisted. They were going to have it their way. When will they, and us today, ever learn that faith is submitting to the LORD'S way. Understand this: if we insist on our way, then the LORD will not be present with us, and we are doomed to failure.

4) "The LORD has promised": The Lord's promise would be kept to their children, but not to them. That had already been made very clear. Many times men cite the Scripture out of context to prove something completely contrary to the truth. Even Satan used the word of the LORD with which to tempt Jesus. It is not enough to quote Scripture; it must be applied correctly.

The Consequence

"For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you.' But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah." (Numbers 14:43-45) Of course the people were doomed to fail. The LORD was not with them. They marched against an enemy stronger than them, and were defeated.

Before they began their foolish assault, Moses had asked; "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed?" (Numbers 14:41). That is an equally good question to pose today when men and women presume to worship and serve God in ways other than He has authorized. The only way we can know for sure how God feels about anything is for Him to tell us. The New Testament says; "...Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" and then continues by encouraging us to "know the things freely given to us by God" by examining the words of inspired revelation (I Corinthians 2:10-13). How can we know what God wants? By listening to His word. How can we know we are pleasing to Him? By obeying His word.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 2.6; June, 1995

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A Principle Many Need To Relearn

Deuteronomy 13:6-11

When God gave the commandments to Israel, He first told them to not to worship other gods. He explained that He was a jealous God who would surely punished all those who gave homage to idols. (Ex. 20:1-6) When the nation of Israel was given over to idolatry God gave them the national death penalty. He disavowed, dispossessed and destroyed them.

To keep this ultimate penalty from coming on the whole people, God provided that anyone who introduced such evil, even secretly and privately, should be condemned. Thus the nation would not be corrupted and could maintain its purity. Deut. 13:6-11 "If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), 8 you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. 9 But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 10 So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 11 Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you." God knew that everyone who perverted the people by leading them into false ways had a mother, a father, a brother and a friend. But those relationships were not to give cover to evil. You had to love God and right even more than you loved your closest friends and relatives.

This may seem like a harsh standard, but it was the standard of God. This is contrary to human nature (man's sinful will). Proof of this is seen in the reaction of numerous people to the evil done by their relatives. Under the heading of "All in the Family," the Wall Street Journal's online service, OpinionJournal.com, published the following outrageous statements (web address for all these at the end of article - wjh):

"Sheikh Ahmad spoke fondly of his older brother, describing him as a simple, deeply religious man with 'a very soft heart' who 'hates injustice.'"--CNN, quoting Osama bin Laden's half-brother. "The real John Walker is a thoughtful, gentle, kind, committed Muslim whose strength of faith has impressed everyone who knows him."--Marin Mujahid, John Walker Lindh's cousin Musa Abdun Nur, himself a convert to Islam, quoted in the New York Times.

"I believe in Andrea. She is the kindest, sweetest, gentlest person I've ever met."--Andrea Yates's husband, Russell, quoted by the Associated Press.

Here is defense of evil based on personal bias. The murderer of thousands is a soft hearted, religious hater of evil. The spoiled sympathizer and willing adherent of the great murderer is impressive in his kindness, gentleness and strong faith. The murderer of her own five children is kind, sweet and gentle, having more of these qualities than anyone that the father of those same murdered children knows. (He must not know many people.)

When we hear these outrages we just shake our heads, gag, or call these people liars. This is not just the reaction of the devout, but even of a worldly newspaper that compiled these things to show the similarities in these horrifying, scandalous and offenses statements. It is pure evil naked enough for the world to see.

But often we see the same sentiments (and these are sentimental, not reasonable defenses) expressed to a lesser degree to cover other evils closer to home. Parents won't condemn their children who are caught in sin. They defend them and accuse those who expose the sin and call for repentance. Preachers condemn error, unless it is found in their family or lifelong friends. Then they will defend fellowship with them in their destructive heresies and make charges against those who expose the sin and mark the false teacher so that the brethren can be warned.

Yet God said in Deut. 13 to not only to "not listen" to the one closest to your heart if they do evil, but He also further said not to "pity," "spare" or "conceal" them. Then when capital punishment was executed upon them, the dear one was to be the first to stone them. Of course now we don't have to literally do that (thus our excuses are even flimsier and have less merit than Israel's might have), but we still must rebuke and exposes the error. But many refuse even to acknowledge the clear error.

Some just cannot bring themselves to live up to the standard that God set forth. Their love of men who are dear to them (friends, family, brethren) who are caught in evil overwhelms their faithfulness to God. "But what about unconditional love?" they whine. "Don't we love these dear ones too much to do this?" Shouldn't we rather be concerned with unconditional faithfulness to God? "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Mark 10:37,38)

The problem with defending evil is that it encourages further evil. Why did God say to punish even the dear one who did evil? "Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you." (Deut. 13:11) Correspondingly, what was the preacher in the N.T. told to do? "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning." (1 Tim. 5:20) Evil is only checked by exposure and condemnation by the proclamation of truth. The closer to the source of evil, and the sooner it is done, the more effective the rebuke is.

Let us all then live up to the admonition that Paul gave Timothy. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality." (1 Tim. 5:21) Let us have the integrity and fortitude to apply to gospel standard to all -- friends, relatives, children and ourselves included.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 9-4; April 2002

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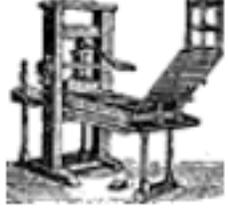
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As For Me And My House We Will Serve the Lord

Joshua 24:15

As Joshua prepared the children of Israel for the land of Canaan he made it clear that first priority went to those with whom he had immediate and direct control: he and his "house." Joshua had a family. As concerned as Joshua was about the children of Israel, he knew that he and his family must live by their faith IN GOD, not Israel(the majority). He was willing to stand by his faith against the greatest of odds to serve God. (Numbers 14: 6-10) Remember, he and Caleb were the only two of the spies who said that with God's help they could take the promised land. He moved with similar spiritual strength before Israel when entering the land. Though not flawless, his lead is an example for all men to learn from and follow. (Hebrews 3: 7-19)

It is clear that Joshua took the lead in his household. There was no outward timidity, hesitation, or question about his role in the family. Inwardly he may often have experienced excruciating agony. Yet, he moved forward with God's will realizing his first responsibility was for the leading of his family, then the nation. Of course, by viewing the leadership with his family, the nation viewed first hand the type of spiritual leadership they were being offered in Joshua. Does this not remind you about the qualification of elders? (1 Timothy 3) People desperately need solid examples of spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is first developed and refined in the home. The training ground for larger spiritual responsibilities originates in a smaller setting. (James 1: 2-4) The problems and solutions faced in the family make or break a man's progress to larger leadership responsibilities in the Lord's church. This does not mean, if under a man's leadership his family spiritually disintegrates, that he cannot be saved or be of use in the Lord. It does, however, profoundly reflect upon that man's ability to take on a larger leadership role in the Lord's service. Remember Eli's family? (1 Samuel 1-4) Men, make sure that if your family spiritually disintegrates, it is not a result of your abandoning your role as a spiritual leader.

Practicing the leadership role invites disdain from some. Joshua took a bold stand to serve the Lord regardless of its popularity. (Numbers 14: 10) By faith, men must take the leadership role even when the spiritual course is unpopular. (Hebrews 11) This calls for tough decision-making. (2 Corinthians 2: 4-6; 1 Corinthians 5: 3-6) However, the man does not have to be mean-spirited about the decision. For the spirit used to lead is as important as the fact that one leads. (Galatians 6: 1) When you make mistakes as a leader it will come back to you in a double portion. Not only will you be challenged regarding the circumstances surrounding the error, but your ability to lead will also be called into question with each

and every error. How you handle the mistakes will also prove your leadership. Start in the home. Take the stand to be a spiritual leader. Admit your errors, repent of them, ask for forgiveness, correct them, and move forward.

Move forward in your role as a spiritual leader realizing it is the highest form of service. (Matthew 20: 28; 1 Corinthians 11: 1) By the same token, service is the highest act of leadership. (Philippians 2: 5-13) When you lead by serving others, some will take advantage of you. Some will use your service for their selfish gain, then abandon you in the face of trial. You must face criticism for taking a stand and making a change in your life. You must face others, even of your own house, who will criticize and remind you that you cannot be a spiritual leader because they remember you as you WERE. That is good, in the sense of reminding you of your need to maintain humility while leading. (Romans 12: 3-8) You will be misinterpreted, misquoted, and generally unappreciated for your direction. There are exceptions, of course. You will be appreciated by some and praised by few. Rest your faith in, and draw your spiritual strength from God, not the praise of others.

It does not matter what else you, as a man, accomplish in this life if you fail as a Christian and spiritual leader to your family. If men do not stand up and take the spiritual lead of their house, they may face accompanying each other in Hell. Men have the responsibility (opportunity and God-given ability) to take the lead. (1 Corinthians 11: 1-3; Ephesians 5: 23; 6: 1-4;) It is too late to correct error, change, and take the spiritual lead only when you or your family has left this life, or you abdicate your life in Christ to Satan! (Luke 16: 27-31; Hebrews 6: 4-8; 2 Peter 2: 20-22) Taking the spiritual lead late in you and your family's life does not guarantee spiritual success with them, but it does guarantee the greatest ally in the fight to redeem yourself and your family from the forces of Satan.

By David Horton
From Expository Files 5.1; January 1998

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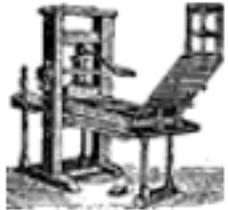
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Major Lessons From the "Minor Judges"

Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon

Judges 3:31; 10:1-5; 12:8-15

Introduction:

This lesson focuses on six men--six buried men. They are all buried in graves and tombs throughout the land of Israel. They are also "buried" in the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Judges. Sadly, these six men have been consigned to obscurity. Yet they are real men of Hebrew history, men chosen by God in His unfolding scheme of redemption. Of course, I speak of the "minor judges" Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

It is true that there is little preserved of them in Scripture. When compared to such giants as Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, they do at first glance appear to be insignificant. Yet I am persuaded that we can learn some "major lessons" from these "minor judges." (see note 1)

1. No one is exempt from serving God.

Consider Shamgar. He battled the Philistines with an ox goad. It is very likely that he was just a poor farmer (i.e., a peasant).

Consider Jair. It is evident that he was a man of great wealth and authority. Jair had 30 sons. Each son had an "ass colt" or "donkey" (a sign of wealth and status back then) and each son was assigned his own city. (How would you like to have your own city? How would you like to be related to the one who gave you that city?) Still, the author of Judges notes that these 30 cities were known as "Havoth-jair" (literally, "The Towns of Jair") "unto this day." It is one thing to have a town named after you. It is quite another thing for a whole group of towns to be named after you...and for the name to "stick"!

Consider Ibzan. He had 60 children (30 sons and 30 daughters)! Apparently, he was wealthy enough to arrange marriages from abroad for his sons and to send his daughters abroad for their marriages.

(Whether this was in or out of Israel is unknown.) What is certain is that he, like Jair, was rich and influential.

Consider Abdon. His large family (40 sons and 30 grandsons) implies that he was a man of great wealth and status. His 70 descendants each had an ass colt or donkey (cf. Jair). Since this was an expensive mode of transportation back then, the closest equivalent for today would be for a modern-day Grandfather seeing to it that all his sons and grandsons received a brand-new car! My point is this: Everyone can (and must) serve God. No one is exempt. Whether rich or poor, peasant farmer or wealthy nobleman, these men rendered service that was acceptable and blessed by God. They understood that their talents and possessions ultimately belonged to the Lord and were to be used for Him, not self-aggrandizement. (cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11,17,22-25)

2. Serve God even if you are a "nobody."

In his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, the Jewish historian, Josephus, says of Ibzan: "He did nothing in the seven years of his administration that was worth recording, or deserved a memorial." Of Elon, Josephus says: "Neither did Helon...do anything remarkable." Of Abdon, he writes: "He is only recorded to have been happy in his children; for the public affairs were then so peaceable, and in such security, that neither did he perform any glorious action...he died an old man, and obtained a magnificent burial."

Rather than looking to ourselves and asking to be excused (cf. Lk. 14:18ff), we need to look to God and get to work. "But I'm just a nobody..." sounds a lot like the feeble excuse of Moses (cf. Exod. 3:11). God didn't accept that excuse then and He will not accept it today. (see note 2)

This excuse "But I'm just a nobody..." could have been used by the any one of the minor judges--even the apostle Paul himself (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-10; Eph. 3:8; 2 Cor. 12:11)--but they all determined to serve God in their generation. (see note 3)

3. Serve God with what you have.

Shamgar was probably a contemporary of Jael and is mentioned in Deborah's victory song (Jgs. 5:6). The fact that she mentions him indicates that he was held in high esteem in the land. His war instrument was an ox goad. This was a farming tool! Generally, it was about eight feet long with a sharp metal spike at one end to prod animals to work. Shamgar used this humble agricultural implement in battle against Philistia. (see note 4)

As we consider Shamgar and his humble weapon, let us allow the lesson of his ox-goad to "prod" us to acknowledge the fact that there is room in God's kingdom for the "small things" that we can do (Lk. 16:10; cf. Matt. 25:21). Sometimes, we may feel that unless we hear the blowing of trumpet fanfares and the cheering of crowds, then we are unworthy to even get started. Yet, at the end of time, when every account is rendered, we may very well find that the greatest deeds were done quietly and unassumingly, far distant from the limelight (cf. the lesson of the widow's two mites in Lk. 21:1-4). Moses' rod (Exod.

4:1-5) was a simple shepherd's tool, but what great things God accomplished through it! "What is that in thine hand?"

"It isn't what you'd do tomorrow
If a million should be your lot;
But what you're doing now
With the dollar and quarter you've got!"

4. Service to God must be courageous and voluntary.

Tola, we are told, was of the tribe of Issachar. He "arose" to defend (literally, "save") Israel. He was a volunteer who offered his leadership talents in willing service. It appears that Tola did not wait to be sought out by his fellow Israelites. Neither did he wait for them to throng around him and beg him to do what was necessary. Tola saw the need; he arose; he saved Israel. What a champion!

Shamgar faced 600 armed pagan soldiers with a lowly farm tool. His bravery and courage are obvious.

We need more people like Tola and Shamgar. We need more who will **ARISE** and **FIGHT**...voluntarily (cf. Jude 3). Remember, there are no draftees in the church (Psa. 110:3, NASV; see footnote). From Pentecost till the return of Christ, people continue to "volunteer freely" and present themselves as free-will offerings before God (Rom. 12:1-2). Is your service forced and begrudged? Or is it what it ought to be: voluntary?

It is not always popular to stand against ungodliness. In fact, it is frequently very tempting to "go with the flow" and look for the easy way out. However, "The easy way is rarely the right way." We must be constant and true in our service to God and refuse to waver in our convictions (cf. 2 Tim. 1:7-8a; 1 Cor. 16:13). Is your service timid and hesitant? Or is it what it ought to be: courageous?

If your spiritual service to God is truly voluntary and courageous, then you are imitating the examples of the minor judges!

5. Even "ordinary" men can be heroes.

It is interesting to note what did not occur during the respective administrations of the minor judges. There were no great invasions or mass oppression from infidelic forces. Neither were there any civil wars brewing or igniting. The land was at peace. Tola judged in peace for 23 years; Jair, 22; Elon, 10; Abdon, 8; Ibzan, 7. (The length of Shamgar's judgeship is unknown--although Josephus speculates that he died during his first year as judge).

A "hero" is "a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities." How can these six men be

considered "heroes," you ask? Any time a man performs regular, routine, even ordinary service unto God--voluntarily and without complaint--such a man should be admired and praised! These six men kept the peace and kept the faith in their time. They exerted a positive influence on those around them. Is there nothing noble about that? Is there nothing admirable--even heroic--in stemming the tide of sin and apostasy

in one's own time? Is there nothing honorable in being a part of the very oracles of God? (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Read 1 Cor. 15:58 and Gal. 6:9, then consider this: Is it possible that the taproot of much of our discouragement lies in the fact that we feel our service in the Lord's vineyard is regular, routine, and ordinary?

Conclusion:

At least five major lessons can be learned at the feet of these six "minor glamorous exploits of the "Major Judges," but Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon are preserved in Scripture for a reason. These six ordinary, obscure men are like Abel in that they being dead, "yet speak" (cf. Heb. 11:4). They "tell" us that it is not necessary that our service be recognized and awarded by men; if God takes note and is pleased, it is enough! The world may look upon our lives and snort in disgust--using the phraseology of Josephus: he did "nothing remarkable"; she did "nothing worthy of memorial" --but we do not pant after worldly fame and acclaim. (Gal. 1:10) We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4) and long to hear His thrilling invitation: "Come, inherit My Celestial City." (cf. Matt. 25:34; Heb. 11:16)

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

End Notes

This article was "inspired" by John L. Kachelman, Jr. in his fine little book *Studies in Judges: "The Love and Discipline of God"*, pp. 129-138 (Quality Publications: Abilene, Texas; 1985). Although I admit to "stealing" the title of Chapter XII in his book, the bulk of the above exegesis is my own and many points only suggested by him I took the liberty of developing further. If the reader is interested in a homiletical/devotional approach to the book of Judges, I say two words: get Kachelman. His comments on Samson alone are worth the price of the book.

It has been said that the life of Moses can be divided into three parts:

Moses thought he was really somebody.

Moses learned that he was really nobody.

Moses learned what God can do with a nobody.

If these six men really were just a bunch of nobodies, then God would have excluded them from the Bible and it would be 14 verses shorter than it is.

The 600 Philistines that Shamgar slew may refer to either a single battle engagement or the total number slain throughout his judgeship.

By Craig Meyer
From Expository Files 4.5; May 1997

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Gideon's "Tunnel Vision"

Judges 6:1-32

In the book of Judges we find an individual named Gideon, who in later times will gain the testimony of being one of the great "men of faith" of the Old Testament (Hebrews 11:32). Gideon represents an interesting example of faith, a man who continually needed signs from God to be assured of His will, yet when he did act, he did so mightily in the LORD.

Even though Gideon often hesitates and has his doubts, when God first approaches Gideon, Gideon seems to show no compunction in bringing forth an accusation against God.

And Gideon said unto him, "Oh, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all his wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' but now the LORD hath cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian," (Judges 6:13).

Why is Gideon saying such things?

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel; and because of Midian the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and the caves, and the strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east; they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents; they came in as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number: and they came into the land to destroy it. And Israel was brought very low because of Midian; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, (Judges 6:2-6).

Israel was having a hard time. The Midianites, Arabian nomads, along with their allies, were continually destroying all of their crops, and therefore Israel was in a really bad position. When God sends His angel to announce to Gideon that God will raise him up to deliver Israel, Gideon charges God with wrong on the basis of how Midian has been able to treat Israel.

One can certainly understand Gideon's viewpoint. After all, did he not hear all the stories of how God delivered his fathers from the hands of the Egyptians, a far more powerful people than the Midianites?

And yet, as it seemed to Gideon, God had completely forsaken His people, for He had not delivered them from Midian. Gideon, therefore, certainly believes that he has a case for his beef with God.

Yet what do we hear from the viewpoint of the inspired author of Judges?

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel: and he said unto them, "Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, "I am the LORD your God; ye shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell." But ye have not hearkened unto my voice,'" (Judges 6:7-10).

Furthermore, in the next act of Gideon, we see a powerful demonstration of this very matter:

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had spoken unto him: and it came to pass, because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, so that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night. And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

And they said one to another, "Who hath done this thing?"

And when they inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing."

Then the men of the city said unto Joash, "Bring out thy son, that he may die, because he hath broken down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the Asherah that was by it."

And Joash said unto all that stood against him, "Will ye contend for Baal? Or will ye save him? he that will contend for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him contend for himself, because one hath broken down his altar." Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal contend against him," because he hath broken down his altar, (Judges 6:27-32).

The act of Gideon and the response of the people could not more clearly show why God had delivered the Israelites into the hand of Midian. As opposed to doing as the Law would have it, to stone those who worshipped the foreign gods, the people would stone the one who removed the foreign gods and destroyed them! The people had determined evil to be good, and good evil.

What, then, shall we say in regards to these matters?

It's always easy to remain locked in one's own viewpoint and have a case of "tunnel vision". In this tunnel vision, you neglect your own difficulties and sins, and instead see yourself as entirely justified, and then presume to charge a wrong to another. Gideon certainly did this...if he were a bit more circumspect, he would surely understand why God had delivered Israel into the hand of Midian. On the basis of his own narrow perspective, and not taking into account the sin of Israel, he presumed to charge God with having forsaken His people...when, in reality, the opposite was the case.

How often do we see God being charged with wrong when the problem tends to lay more with those

charging God with the wrong? How often do we hear of people asking how God could allow the tsunami, or the hurricane, or a fire, or an illness, to strike, and people seem to never chalk such things up to either happenstance or the presence of sin! People are always quick to charge God with wrongs, but never thank God for blessings. The focus is always on what is wrong, and never on what is right.

Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that we in Christ are immune from this thinking; we often betray such by how we handle one another. We often suffer from the same tunnel vision in regards to our own brethren. How often do we overlook our own shortcomings and faults and go after our brethren for theirs? It's always easier to point the finger at someone else-- it's never comfortable to return it to yourself.

Consider the example of Paul. How many letters did he write in which he had the need to rebuke and chastise brethren for their shortcomings and faults? And yet it is difficult to find a letter in which Paul does not have at least something through which he can commend those brethren. The Corinthians, if nothing else, did have a generous heart. Notice also that he always did make commendation where appropriate-- for, in the end, no matter how many difficulties our brethren may have, they remain our brethren, the elect of God, those for whom Christ died. That ought to count for something when we consider how we are going to treat them!

Let us all consider this example of Gideon and his "tunnel vision" and strive to have a more perspicacious perspective, taking into consideration not only ourselves but how God would perceive the matter (as we can understand from His revealed word), and how others are perceiving the matter. Such reflects the attitudes enjoined upon Christians in 2 Corinthians 13:5, Romans 15:1, and 1 Corinthians 10:24. Let us not be chastised or condemned for having "tunnel vision"!

By Ethan R. Longhenry
From Expository Files 13.7; July 2006

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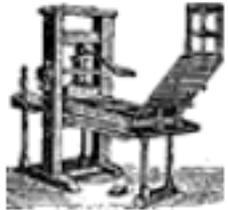
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God Calls Gideon

Gideon (part one of three)

Judges 6

Gideon was the fifth judge of Israel. He played a small but important role in the history of God's people. Gideon lived during a time when Israel had forsaken God and had worshipped idols. The nation had abandoned its true source of national strength and the source of its blessings much like our own nation has done today. God had withdrawn his blessings and protection, and the nation had suffered. As voices began to call upon God for deliverance, God used Gideon to answer the need. Gideon was a reluctant leader who was finally convinced of the power of God. He ultimately led the children of Israel in victory over their enemies, the Midianites. We find the account of this part of Israel's history in Judges chapters 6-8.

The Call Of Gideon

During this particular time, it was the Midianites who oppressed Israel. This oppression took the form of organized bands raiding Israel and burning homes and planted fields and killing the animals. Many of the people of Israel took to hiding in caves and strongholds in the mountains. As one might guess, they were hungry due to the loss of their crops and livestock (Judges 6:1-10).

The problems had begun when the children of Israel "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (vs. 1). As things grew worse and worse, many in Israel cried out to the Lord. A prophet was sent to the people with God's message. The three part message reminded Israel that God had "delivered you" in the past and secondly they were told, "Do not fear the gods of the Amorites." Thirdly, they were told the reason for their suffering as God spoke through the prophet saying, "You have not obeyed my voice." (vss. 8-10).

Then, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon at Ophrah while Gideon was threshing his wheat (vss. 11-27). Gideon is referred to as a "valiant warrior" (vss. 11-12). But this valiant warrior had a question for the Lord. Gideon's question was why had things gone so badly if God was with them (vs. 13). The Lord promised to be with Gideon and that he would defeat the Midianites (vss. 14, 16). Like many of the people God chose to work for Him, Gideon wondered "Why me?" He said his father's house was the least in the whole tribe of Manasseh and he was the youngest in the house.

Gideon asked for a sign. As instructed, Gideon prepared a meal and brought it to the Lord. The Lord touched the meat with His staff, and it was consumed with fire. (vss 19-24).

Following this, Gideon was commanded to tear down the altar of Baal and build one to God (vss. 25-27). He destroyed the altar of Baal, but many of the people, still not ready to renounce idolatry altogether, were angry and demanded Gideon's life. Gideon's father, Joash, said, "If he (Baal) is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down" (vs. 33). Gideon was called Jerubbaal by the people after that (which means "let Baal contend against him").

The Midianites and the Amalekites assembled at Jezreel for war and Gideon called for help from neighboring tribes. (vss. 28-35). Gideon, being exceedingly cautious, requested two additional signs from God: "If you will save Israel by my hand..." (Judges 6:36-40). The first sign: dew on fleece, ground around it dry in the morning. The second sign: dew on ground, fleece dry. Yes, God was with Gideon and Gideon was ready to do whatever the Lord asked of him.

Confidence Builder

Even "the least" in the kingdom of God are of use to the Father. By faith, Gideon, the "least one in his father's house" became a valiant warrior with God. (Judges 6:15). Gideon is mentioned in the New Testament as being one who by faith "... became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight" (Hebrews 11:32, 34). Though the "weapons of our warfare" are spiritual, and not carnal, the same principle holds true. We will win the battle by faith. That is our confidence and strength.

We need to understand that the strength comes from God by faith. Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13). Paul made the point that every member of the church has important roles to fulfill which contribute to the overall success of the body (Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 12:14-26).

Also, when we face the "impossible", we need to remember: "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27).

God Blesses the Faithful and Obedient

God blesses those who obey Him, but withholds the blessing for those who sin. This is true for individuals as well as nations. There are several reasons that this is so.

First, with God one is aware of eternal and wonderful blessings which faith brings. This is true even in the evil day. We recall Paul and Silas singing praises to God from an inner prison (Acts 16:25). Nothing in which we suffer loss here will take away our eternal blessings!

Second, we are assured of salvation if we obey the Lord. "And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation..." (Hebrews 5:9). The source of our salvation is the Lord Creator of the universe! It is the same one about which that the Book of Hebrews begins by saying, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands" (Hebrews 1:10).

Thirdly, For those who use the blessings, whether time, material or talents, to serve Him He promises to bless by providing more and greater opportunities; "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, 'He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.' Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God." (2 Corinthians 9:8-11).

False Gods Are Worthless

Idolatry is a bankrupt system of belief. False gods can do nothing. Jehovah is God, Baal is a god. There is a big difference!

The same is true of false religion systems and humanistic philosophies and occultist practices. Jeremiah cautioned, "Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good." (JER 10:1-5). In the New Testament, we read, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority..." Colossians 2:8-10). Let us serve the Lord with joy! Let the God of Gideon also be our God!

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 14.5; May 2007

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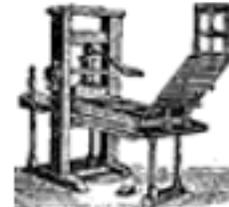


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Gideon Answers God's Call *Gideon (Part 2 of 3)*

Judges 7

Gideon was the fifth judge of Israel. He played a small but important role in the history of God's people. Gideon lived during a time when Israel had forsaken God and had worshipped idols. The nation had abandoned its true source of national strength and the source of its blessings much like our own nation has done today. God had withdrawn his blessings and protection, and the nation had suffered. As voices began to call upon God for deliverance, God used Gideon to answer the need. Gideon was a reluctant leader who was finally convinced of the power of God. He ultimately led the children of Israel in victory over their enemies, the Midianites.

“Saved By My Own Hand”

After God had called Gideon and Gideon had been persuaded to accept the task God gave him, it was time to act. We find the account of Gideon's defeat of the Midianites in Judges 7:1-8:21.

Gideon's army of 32,000 was reduced in size (vss. 1-8). Already sorely outnumbered (the enemy numbered over 120,000 swordsmen), most would see this as a time to go out and recruit more warriors. But it might be that after the victory the Lord would give them, the people might think it had been by their own strength and ability that they had won the victory. So, the Lord commanded Gideon to further reduce the number under his command "...lest Israel claim glory for itself...saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" (Judges 7:2). Any who were “afraid and trembling” were told they could go home. Some 22,000 departed leaving 10,000 to fight the Midianites.

So, it went from being outnumbered 4 to 1 to being outnumbered 12 to 1. No doubt Gideon was surprised to hear what the Lord said next: “Then the LORD said to Gideon, 'The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there.’” (Judges 7:4).

At the site to which the Lord had directed Gideon's army there was drinkable water. The army stopped to drink and 9,700 knelt down on their knees so they might drink directly from the stream. The other 300 cupped their hands and took water into them, drinking it from their hands as a dog would lap water from his bowl. “The LORD said to Gideon, 'I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.’” (Judges 7:7).

“The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon”

Gideon attacked the Midianites with his 300 men who took torches, pitchers, swords, and trumpets. (vss. 9-23). “Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, 'Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.’” (Judges 7:9).

Gideon's 300 divided into three groups of 100 each. They spaced themselves around the Midianite camp, and when signaled, they broke the pitchers revealing the torches. They shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" (Judges 8:20-23).

There was much confusion in the camp as startled Midianite fought against Midianite in the darkness. That night the Midianites were routed. As they retreated, the assistance of the tribe of Ephraim was requested to cut off the fleeing Midianites as they crossed the Jordan.

As Gideon's 300 continued to pursue the scattered remnants of the Midianites, the people of Succoth and Penuel refused to give bread to Gideon's army. They did not want to give assistance because they were not sure which way the battle was going. If they helped, and Gideon lost the battle, they might be punished by Midian. Later, after the battle was won, Gideon would return and destroy the two towns (8:5,8,16,17).

The final battle of the campaign was fought at Jogbehah. The Midianite army was routed again, and the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna were killed.

One Man and God is a Majority

God does not depend on large numbers of people to accomplish His goals. This is certainly one of the things we learn from the battle Gideon and his 300 waged. The Lord has often demonstrated His power by taking a few and accomplishing His purpose. To His disciples Jesus once said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:31-32). Don't be afraid of being in the minority if that is what it takes to be right with God! It is better to be in what Jesus referred to as “little flock” just as it was better to be among Gideon's 300. Paul once stated it this way: “...let God be found true, though every man be found a liar...” (Romans 3:4). Our number one priority is to stand with the Lord on any and every issue. We are at war; a spiritual conflict (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). We can go with the majority, or we can go with God.

God's Power and Victory

Another thing we learn from Gideon's victory over the enemy is that God's power is enough to win in any conflict. All spiritual victories occur because of God's power and not because of ours. The Scripture says, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Whether it be Gideon and his battle or ourselves and our salvation, the power for success is God's.

Those of Gideon's day had no reason to boast concerning their own power. The Lord wanted them to realize that they did not deliver themselves from the Midianites. Likewise, He does not accept our own boasting about our salvation. "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:30,31).

Assisting Those Who Fight the Lord's Battles

One final point to be made from Gideon's experience is that we should always be willing to assist those who are carrying out the Lord's will. The people of Succoth and Penuel had refused to give bread to Gideon's army and were punished. They wanted to see the outcome first before they risked anything. Sometimes, people of faith simply must be willing to take risks when it comes to doing the will of the Lord. Paul expresses his gratitude for

"Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks..." (Romans 16:3-4). We are encouraged to support those who put forth effort in the field. This is a worthy and noble endeavor (3 John 5-8). Sometimes the battle will be ours, and we should be able to have confidence in our good brethren's support. Likewise, when the battle is theirs, we must fill the supportive role, that God's work might be done.

By Jon W. Quinn
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Weakest Side of the Strongest Man

Judges 13-16

Step aside Hulk Hogan! He's more than a match for you or anyone who has ever stepped into the ring to beat or be beaten by you! Who is he? It is someone who I would imagine that the very sight of would send dark chills deep within the souls of his opponents. His reputation had spread far and wide among both friends and enemies, and deservedly so. Professional wrestlers today are notorious for their antics, but all their bravado and bluff are nothing compared to the deeds of the subject of this article. He does have something in common with many of the modern wrestlers though. While physically strong, he was not very bright. (If you happen to know any professional wrestlers, please don't tell them I said that.)

BACKGROUND OF THE STRONG MAN

"Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the Lord blessed him." (JUDGES 13:24).

His birth and purpose:

The time was eleven centuries before Christ. The nation of Israel was young and leaderless because as yet the monarchy had not been established. In times of trouble God would raise up temporary leaders referred to as "judges" in the Bible, though their function was seldom what we think of as a judge. Usually their leadership consisted of delivering the young nation from her enemies and calling her unto repentance when she was wayward. This period lasted about four hundred years from Joshua up until Samuel.

Because of Israel's evil deeds, the Lord had used the Philistines to punish her. Samson was born to deliver a penitent Israel from Philistine oppression. The Lord promised a childless couple that they would have a son, but that he would be under the Nazarite vow all his life. He was never to eat anything unclean, drink of the fruit of the vine or ever cut his hair (JUDGES 13:4,5; cf. NUMBERS 6:2-21).

His character:

Samson is unique among the judges for several reasons. Though judges were leaders, Samson never led in a direct sense. While certainly he "led" the people out of oppression, he did it alone. There is no evidence that he ever led an army or ever challenged the people to live by their faith. Samson was able to continue to accomplish heroic feats as long as the vow was kept. While this shows his faith, it is also

true that he was a very worldly man and succumbed easily to temptations. Ultimately, this would lead to his downfall. Samson is a case of a person who was abundantly blessed by God, but who became a tragic hero because of his many negative qualities when he could have been so much more. He succeeded in burying his talent under his own sin.

His life:

There are three women in Samson's life that shouldn't have been there. The first was a Philistine girl in Timna, a Philistine town not far from Samson's home. He fell in love with her and decided to marry her though his parents objected, preferring an Israelite girl. (14:4). It was during subsequent trips to Timna to see his girlfriend that Samson broke the first part of the Nazarite vow. Upon finding honey in the carcass of a lion he had earlier killed, he ate some of it. The dead body of the lion rendered the honey unclean (NUMBERS 14:5-9; NUMBERS 6:6).

The breaking of the next part of the vow seems to have come at his wedding feast. The Hebrew word for "feast" used in this passage implies drinking, and it was Samson who made the feast (NUMBERS 14:10-20).

Ultimately, the Philistines take Samson's new wife and give her to another. Samson spills much Philistine blood before and after the fact. Though Samson is very carnal, God still uses him to punish, weaken and drive out the Philistines.

The second woman was a harlot in Gaza. While Samson is carrying on with her, the Philistines of the city are plotting his death. They laid their plans well, but Samson's strength was too much for them. When they locked the city gates to trap him, he simply ripped them off their hinges and carried them nearly forty miles away (JUDGES 16:1-3).

It was the breaking of the third part of the vow when God's Spirit, who was providing Samson with his strength, left him. This is not to say that up to this point God was pleased with Samson's deeds; He was not because Samson sinned against God. But God had continued to use him as long as the vow was partially kept. The breaking of the third part of the vow rendered Samson without power. Samson fell in love with Delilah. The five lords of the Philistines bribed her with silver to find the source of Samson's strength and reveal it to them. After some work, she enticed Samson into stupidly revealing the connection between his hair and his strength. When he was asleep, she cut it and Samson was captured by the waiting Philistines (16:4-22).

You can be sure that Samson is not treated kindly by his captors. They blind him and put him to work as a slave. Then during a celebration to the Philistine god Dagon, they bring Samson to the temple to mock him. Samson prays to his God for strength for one last time, grasps two pillars of the temple, and pulls it down on top of himself and the gathered Philistines, resulting in his own death as well as that of more Philistines than he had killed during his whole life.

SOME THINGS SIN ALWAYS DOES

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our

Lord." (ROMANS 6:23). Sin always looks better than it really is. It did to Samson. People are much more prone to sin if they do not allow themselves to think about the possible negative consequences. Samson didn't spend much time thinking about that either.

Sin will always take you further than you wanted to go (JUDGES 16:4-20). Certainly Samson did not see the end result of his affair with Delilah. All she saw was her pretty eyes. "After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah." (16:4). If it had been up to Samson, that would have been as far as his sin would take him. Just to the point of the gratification afforded him by yielding to temptation.

There would have been no visit of the Philistines to Delilah with their offers of a bribe. There would have been no searching questions posed by her to Samson concerning his strength. Her love would be true. And certainly he would never reveal the source of his strength. Why is it so difficult to stop with just a "small sin" with only "small consequences" to pay?

Sin will always keep you longer than you wanted to stay. It would be difficult to come up with a better picture of the bondage of sin than that of Samson. "Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in prison." (16:21). Samson suffered much because of his sin. Some of the consequences could never be undone. Though he could be forgiven, his eyesight was gone forever.

Sometimes we can patch up the damage caused by our sins, at least to a degree. We can perhaps make restitution to someone we have wronged, for example. But some things can never be brought back or undone. You cannot bring a child back to childhood and raise him again. You cannot make things right with someone who has died. You cannot rid yourself of a terminal disease brought on by sinful behavior. Sin will always cost you more than you thought it would. It ultimately cost Samson his life (16:30). It looks like he repented of the sin in his life, though we cannot be certain of that. The book of Hebrews briefly mentions his faith (HEBREWS 11:32). Certainly, if Samson had known beforehand what his sin was going to cost him, he would have avoided it. But as horrible as the cost was, please notice something: there are eternal costs to sin which are much more devastating. Samson has a soul that exists today. If Samson was not right with God when he left this world, then the tragic price of sin has continued to mount to this day and will continue to do so for eternity. Samson was physically strong. Maybe he thought himself impervious to damage, even spiritual. He wasn't, as he found out. He had a great reputation. He was well favored. But whatever he was, he could have been so much more.

By Jon W. Quinn
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The Samson Puzzle

Judges 13-16

The personality of the judge Samson is quite a puzzle indeed. We can read much about him that seems rather contradictory, but if we attempt to sort through Samson's puzzle we can learn much from this example of faith.

Regarding Samson it is written in Judges 13:3:

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, "Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son."

Whose births, in the Bible, are presaged in similar ways?

1. Isaac (Genesis 18:1-10)
2. Samuel (1 Samuel 1:9-20)
3. John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-17)
4. Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 1:28-34)

We also can read of some of Samson's exploits in Judges 14:5-6:

Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnah, and came to the vineyards of Timnah: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid; and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

Who else in the Bible engages in such an exploit? We read of David doing a similar thing in 1 Samuel 17:34-36:

And David said unto Saul, "Thy servant was keeping his father's sheep; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant smote both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God."

Furthermore we have the example of Samson's parents, Manoah and his wife. In Judges 13 their story is told, how the wife saw the angel of the LORD and told her husband about it. Manoah did not doubt her but petitioned the LORD to send the "man back again to inform them what the child would be. There is not the same doubt and constant faithlessness seen otherwise in the book of Judges; they show the proper hospitality in offering to kill a young goat so as to have a feast, offer it to the LORD, and prostrate themselves when they see that they had seen the angel of God. Likewise, in Judges 14 they appeal to Samson for him to marry an Israelite woman and not to go after a Philistine woman. These people are probably the best examples of faith that we can find in Judges.

Returning to Samson, moreover, we read in Judges 13:25:

And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

While we do see the Spirit of the LORD on other judges (particularly Othniel, Judges 3:10, Gideon, Judges 6:34, and Jephthah, Judges 11:25), we see it more consistently on Samson (Judges 13:25, along with 14:6, 14:19, and 15:14). Furthermore, we know that Samson was under a Nazirite vow from birth, separating him from the people (Judges 13:7).

Another particularly interesting matter with Samson may be found in Judges 14:1-4:

And Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife."

Then his father and his mother said unto him, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?"

And Samson said unto his father, "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well."

But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD; for He sought an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines had rule over Israel.

This is rather interesting. While God never wholesale commands Israelites to never intermarry, and there are examples of faith from non-Israelites (particularly Jael the Kenite and Ruth the Moabitess, Judges 4-5, Ruth), by far the majority of the discussion of intermarriage is negative. The incident of Baal-peor, where Israelites married Moabite women and worshipped idols, was legendary (Numbers 25:1-9, Deuteronomy 4:3). The same is true of Solomon and his wives (1 Kings 11:1-10), and also at the time of Ezra (Ezra 9). Yet here God is directing Samson, against the pleas of his parents who want him to do the thing that ordinarily you would think God would want of him, to marry a Philistine woman!

These matters are all brought up because of the singularly contradictory character of Samson. We can read of Samson in Hebrews 11:32:

And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets.

We see, then, that Samson is included in the "hall of fame" of faith, and yet we read of his exploits. His

anger is legendary (Judges 14:20-15:6), he fornicated with harlots (Judges 16:1), and his overweening pride got the better of him (Judges 16:20). Of all the judges he was the least successful, since even though he killed thousands of Philistines, the Philistines oppressed Israel long after his death! On the other hand, his birth was presaged in the same way as notable men of faith, his parents are the best examples of faith in the entire book of Judges, his exploits parallel that of Israel's greatest king, and he is listed in the "hall of fame" of the men of faith.

What, then, shall we say in regards to these matters? God uses Samson for His own purpose. Even though Samson did certainly err in many ways, God found a use for Samson. Through Samson's death many more Philistines met their end, and perhaps some refreshment was found for Israel. Samson paved the way for the eventual successes of David over the Philistines. Later on, Samson is considered an example of the faith-- not, of course, because everything he did was holy and pious, but because he was, for the greater part of his life, consecrated to God in His service. It may not have always made the most sense in how God used Samson, but His ends were achieved. Despite his imperfections, he sacrificed himself for the greater good of Israel.

Lord willing, we will meet Samson in Heaven and have the opportunity to ask him about his life. Let us learn from his example while we are here on earth, and strive to allow ourselves to be workers in God's service.

By Ethan R. Longhenry
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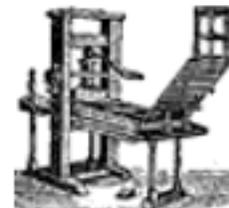


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"Your People Shall Be My People, And Your God, My God"

Ruth 1-4

It was about 400 years from the time that Israel entered Canaan and received the land that God had promised them until the first king was anointed. This period of time was known as the time of the Judges, so called because the leaders of the people were called "Judges". During the period of the judges Israel was steeped in sin, often degraded and immoral. The Scriptures describe the moral and behavioral standards of the times as "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Now, some folks have pretty high standards anyway, but others don't.

For example, the main characters followed in the book of Ruth are not like most of the people we find in the book of Judges, even though the time coincides with the latter years of the Judges. Ruth and Naomi displayed the characteristics of love, industry, generosity, chastity, and the desire to worship the God of Israel. Both women were blessed by God. If I were going to sum up the meaning and value of the book of Ruth, it would be that it shows us a wonderful example of righteous loyalty to a friend even in adverse circumstances. Later, in the New Testament, we would find that brothers and sisters in Christ are to have these same characteristics toward one another and toward God.

Self Sacrificing Love

Naomi's life would have been dark and solitary without Ruth. Naomi was widowed and had lost two sons. She was left with two daughters-in-law in a foreign land. She decided to return to Judah from Moab where she had been living (Ruth 1:6-7).

She was also concerned for her daughters-in-law. She did not want them to feel compelled to accompany her to her own country. Her concern for Ruth's happiness caused her to earnestly request she return to her mother's house, explaining that she had no more sons to give (Ruth 1:8-13).

But Naomi's concern for Ruth was equaled by Ruth's concern for Naomi. But more than that, Ruth, though from Moab, had come to the point where she desired very much to become a worshiper of Jehovah. Ruth was therefore willing to turn from known comforts to embrace the uncertainty of the unknown (Ruth 1:14-17).

God expects us to have concern and love for others. (Galatians 6:2,10). The book of Ruth shows us God has always highly valued selflessness, compassion and generosity, even in times where there was little of those characteristics to be found on the earth (see also Matthew 15:3-6; 22:37-39; 23:23).

Also, God expects us to care for family members. Men and women of faith have and understand these kinds of loyalties (1 Timothy 5:3,4; 16). We understand that Naomi and Ruth were related by marriage; but today Christians are related by blood (of Christ). Certainly we should care for one another (2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:6-8; 10,11).

We are expected to serve God before all else. We wonder what had Ruth seen in Naomi's character and her relationship with her God that caused her to be so loyal? She saw something in Naomi's God... not a God of wood/stone... and she was ready for that (for a description of Ruth's ex-god contrasted with Jehovah-see Jeremiah 10:3-3-6;10; 11-12). Think: what can people see in your relationship with God that might have a similar good effect on them?

Industry and Generosity

Naomi and Ruth arrived back in Judah destitute. Ruth requested she be allowed to go to the field and glean heads of grain (Ruth 2:1,2). The owner of the field, Boaz, took notice (Ruth 2:4,5; 8-12). Ruth shared the grain she gathered with Naomi (Ruth 2:17-18).

We are to be industrious and provide for our own needs (Proverbs 21:5; 31:30,31; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13) . But we are also to share our blessings with others (Ephesians 4:28; Acts 20:35; Matthew 6:33). Though they live over a thousand years before Christ comes and establishes His church, the account of Naomi and Ruth again provides solid good examples of living by faith and demonstrating so many of the qualities that it would one day take to become good Christians.

Blessings

"So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son" (Ruth 4:13). Everyone expressed happiness for Naomi and Ruth. People tend to be for the underdog, and when valiant courage wins over great odds it is a thrilling thing (Ruth 4:14-16). Again, all this is another step toward the fulfilling of the final promise to Abraham to send One, a descendant of Abraham, who would bless all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). Ruth became the great-grandmother of David, through whom would come the Messiah Ruth 4:17).

Ruth's unselfishness had been rewarded by God, and so shall ours be (Hebrews 6:10-12; 19). Those pleasing in the sight of God are always a source of blessing to others (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12).

Ruth was dedicated as she followed Naomi (Ruth 1:16). It is this kind of loyalty that will make one a good disciple (follower) of Jesus. It is a loyalty that will assume any risks; accept whatever losses are called for, and steadfastly follow on (Matthew 16:24).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 11.10; October 2004

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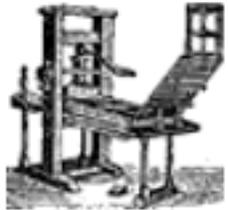
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The God of Hannah

(1 Samuel 2:1-10)

She was the mother of the last judge of Israel, for it would be her son who would, by God's direction, appoint Israel's first king. Hannah had long sought for a baby. She was one of two wives of Elkanah who lived in the hill-country of Ephraim. Elkanah's other wife and mother of several children, unmercifully taunted the childless Hannah. Elkanah did his best to console her and confirm his love for her, but Hannah would not be consoled.

She prayed for a son. Finally, she made a vow that if the Lord would bless her with a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord's service. Evidently that was what the Lord had been waiting for. His plan called for such a one, and so within a year Samuel was born to Elkanah and Hannah. Indeed, he would be a mighty prophet at a pivotal time in Israel's history. He would appoint the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David.

When Samuel was weaned, she kept her vow and took Samuel to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located. This was the center of worship for early Israel in Canaan. Samuel was taken in by the High Priest, Eli, and grew up in Shiloh. Hannah continued to visit her son each year and bring him a new robe. Later, she had other sons and daughters.

Hannah's Prayer of Blessing and Confidence in God

"My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Thy salvation.

There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God.

Boast no more very proudly, do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and with Him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are shattered, but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry cease to hunger. Even the barren gives birth to seven, but she who has many children languishes.

The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts.

He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He sets the world on them.

He keeps the feet of His godly ones, but the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; for not by might shall man prevail.

Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; and He will give strength to His king, and will exalt the horn of His anointed." (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Hannah's Faith

"My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Thy salvation." (1 Samuel 2:1). An animal with large horns is thought to be powerful and beautiful. Hannah speaks of her strength and confidence in the Lord by using this figure of speech. She had a very childlike, trusting faith; the exact kind of humble faith that Jesus said we all need (Matthew 18:1-4).

She had patiently waited for years, praying for what she desired so very much. It was in the Lord's hands, she knew, and during those bleak years of hope she never gave up. And then, after at long last having received of the Lord's goodness, she remembered Him with gratitude. Her joy was enriched because Samuel was the product of the Lord's power. She spoke boldly in the midst of those who would ridicule her, not being ashamed because the LORD was the God of her salvation. May we also enjoy the same exultation, boldness and joy in the Lord today, for He is also the God of our salvation!

God, the Holy Rock

"There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God." (1 Samuel 2:2). The Lord is holy, and therefore trustworthy. He is true and just. Even in the darkest of times, even if we must face injustice of the basest sort, we must understand that in the final reckoning the Lord will ensure that all is well for His people of enduring faith (Hebrews 13:5-6; 10:35-39).

Our God is also described as "a rock." God is solid and dependable. He is an anchor of the soul. His words are a rock amid the shifting sands of human philosophy and pagan beliefs (Matthew 7:24-27).

The God of Knowledge, Judgment and Providence

"Boast no more very proudly, do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and with Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are shattered, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry cease to hunger. Even the barren gives birth to seven, but she who has many children languishes. The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and rich; He

brings low, He also exalts. He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He sets the world on them. (1 Samuel 2:3-9). The arrogant of the world put their trust in themselves as they mock the believer for his or her faith. Hannah warns that such is not a wise thing to do because in addition to being a God of strength, Jehovah is also a God of knowledge and providence. God's wisdom renders the wisdom of men foolishness (Isaiah 55:8,9; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

In addition to making the wise foolish God renders the strong weak. The one who stands against God will fall, and the faithful one who has been the victim of evil men will stand (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Hannah had put her faith in God during her trial. It had been well placed. Let us never forget the lesson to be learned by her example. We know that one day God will exalt those who have humbled themselves before Him, as the mighty fall and the boastful are silenced (Matthew 23:12; James 4:10).

God Directs the Work of His People

He keeps the feet of His godly ones, but the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; for not by might shall man prevail. Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; and He will give strength to His king, and will exalt the horn of His anointed." (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Those who live for God are never alone. There were times when during Hannah's dark hours that there were no discernible signs of what God was going to do for her. But she knew that if there was any hope at all, it was in her God. Those who are on the Lord's side live their lives according to His word, seek His will, do His work, and wait expectantly for His victory.

"He keeps the feet of His godly ones, but the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; for not by might shall man prevail."

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 12.7; July 2005

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

"For Those Who Honor Me, I Will Honor"

1 Samuel 2:12-36

Eli was a priest and judge in Israel during the time of Samuel's birth. This means that he served toward the end of the period of the judges and before Israel had her first human king. He served in the tabernacle at Shiloh. The temple had not yet been built at Jerusalem.

The sons of Eli were corrupt and estranged from God. Eli spoke to his sons, and reprimanded them. However, they ignored their father and continued in their rebellion and Eli never took further steps to correct the situation. As a result, God was not pleased, either with the sons behavior nor with Eli's failure to adequately correct them. Though God had blessed Eli's house, He was going to withdraw His honor of them (1 Samuel 2:30).

Profane and Irreverent Sacrifice

The tabernacle of the Lord was in Shiloh. Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord there (1 Samuel 1:3,9). The Bible describes the corruption of Eli's sons to be so complete that "they did not know the Lord". No doubt they knew His name, but did not know Him (1 Samuel. 2:12).

Eli's sons profaned the sacrifices. They would take meat of the sacrifices before offering them to God. If the worshipper objected, wanting to offer the sacrifice to God before the priest took his portion, it would be taken by force (1 Samuel 2:16). It was supposed to be sacrificed unto God first, then the priests received their portions. In this way, the priests Phinehas and Hophni despised the offering of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:17).

Today, all Christians are to be holy priests, offering spiritual sacrifices to the Lord (1 Peter. 2:5,9). Our sacrifices, too, must be acceptable to God (Romans 12:1,2). Conforming ourselves to the world's standards rather than according to God makes for an unacceptable sacrifice. We are irreverent priests as well when we give God only the leftovers of our lives.

Our priesthood is better than the one of the Old Law. First, because Jesus is our high priest today; a perfect High Priest unlike Eli and his sons (Hebrews 9:11-12; 7:23-25). Second, because we function as our own priesthood. No one can tamper with my sacrifice to the Lord... it is what I determine it to be. If

God only gets the leftovers, then it is my fault, because I am my own priest making my own sacrifice.

Mild Reproof

The corruption of the sons of Eli grew worse and worse. Much like the modern day sex scandals among apostate clergy today, these religious leaders committed acts of fornication with the women who served at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:22). Some say that such behavior is one's own private business. Evidently the Lord feels otherwise.

Eli rebuked his sons. "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD'S people circulating." (1 Sam 2:23-24). Their leadership did not place them above the Law. This was a sin against God as well as against the people (1 Samuel 2:25).

Parents must discipline their children. Though Eli's sons were adults now, one wonders if he had always been so lax as they were growing up. Had he always given them repeated warnings when they were children without ever following through? The Lord expects better of parents than that (Deuteronomy 6:6,7; Ephesians 6:4).

And, on the matter of discipline, the Bible teaches the church should exercise discipline also (1 Corinthians 5:1,2;4-8) There are times when more than a mild reproof is required.

We are also reminded that teachers and preachers and elders have a very great responsibility to live righteously. Greater influence mean greater potential damage through failure. (Romans 2:22-24; cf. vs. 13; 2 Peter 2:2).

God's Response

A man of God came to Eli. Eli's father and his descendants were blessed and honored by God. But to adopt a phrase, "The buck stops here!" Eli was High Priest and he was responsible to see that things were being done righteously. Had been lukewarm in his duties when dealing with his sons. There is also a suggestion in the text that though Eli complained to his sons about what they had been doing, that he, himself profited from their misdeeds; "Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?"

The Lord responded; "Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me; I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30).

The consequence of their rebellion would be grave. Many of Eli's house would die young, before reaching old age (1 Samuel 2:31,32). The household would stagnate, not grow and prosper (1 Samuel 2:33). The instigators, Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day (1 Samuel 2:34). Those who are left will beg for food in poverty, having been expelled from office and wishing that they could have again what they had despised and lost (1 Samuel 2:36).

But God will raise up out of the mess a righteous priest to serve. Samuel? Perhaps. Jesus? Maybe, if speaking of His spiritual priesthood. The time of God judgment on Eli's house was said to be near (1 Samuel 3:11-14). And it was; the deaths of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas are recorded (1 Samuel 4:10,11; 17,18).

There are so many other points that could be made. We as priests in the Lord's kingdom are blessed ((1 Samuel 2:36b; Luke 15:17; 1 Timothy 6:6). We, too, are expected to honor God (1 Timothy 6:11-16). We, too, must love our Lord more than earthly relatives (Luke 12:51-53). Those who mock the warnings of God and continue to be disobedient will be punished (Galatians 6:7,8).

We have received from the hand of the Father many blessings (Ephesians 1:7-8;11,12). These blessings are so great that even death loses its sting when these blessings are understood and received by faith. We must never lose sight of the fact that God had honored us so very richly. We should rise up each morning with deep appreciation of His kindness and never allow ourselves a day in which we forget, as did Eli's sons, who the Lord is and what He expects of us.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.10; October 2006

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Discussion of First Samuel 7:2

1 Samuel 7:2

During the theocracy of Israel, that nation enjoyed the best government that has ever existed. God allowed them the most freedom ("Every man did what was right in his own eyes" Judges 17:6) that civilized man has ever enjoyed yet protected them on every hand by raising up small armies of militia (Gideon and 300 Jud 7:7, Ehud and his left handed dagger Jud 3:15) to deliver them from their enemies. The ark rested originally at Shiloh for hundreds of years. Enough permanent structures were erected around the tabernacle that it is toward the end of its sojourn there called a "temple" (I Sam 1:9). It is at Shiloh that we find the subject of our study: Eli, priest of God; his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas; and Samuel, the boy prophet.

Hophni and Phinehas, like some sons of today, were sons of Belial in the home of a godly man. Eli was a man of love and devotion to God but he failed to discipline his sons though their sins were known to him. Because he was both judge and high priest he could have removed the boys from their positions of power as priests in the house of God or even had them executed for their lying with the women of temple (I Sam 2:22). However, like some preachers of today, he did not have the gumption to take a hard line with his sons, but merely chided them for their reprehensible behavior.

God was disgusted with Eli's lack of respect for His sacred things and determined evil against him (I Sam 2:27-36). God told Eli that He was going to break the strength of Eli's house. As a sign that He would carry out His threat, God said Eli's sons would both die in one day. This happened when the two boys took the ark to battle against the Philistines as a good luck charm. Since God had determined evil against them, the battle was lost, Hophni and Phinehas slain, and the ark taken. Upon hearing the disastrous news, Eli fell backward off his seat at the gate by the road in front of the temple, broke his neck, and died.

The boy prophet Samuel then became judge over Israel. He was likely no more than 17 years old when Eli died. God had already established Samuel as a prophet from a very early age (I Sam 3:1 "the boy Samuel" and I Sam 3:20 "And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord"). Samuel then judged Israel all the days of his long life (I Sam 7:15). He likely lived to be over 100 and judged Israel for more than 80 years.

We base the length of Samuel's judgeship on the statement in Acts 13:19 that God gave them judges by the space of 450 years. The length of all the judges is given except for Shamgar (who was probably a

contemporary of Ehud), Samuel, and Joshua (who is not formally listed in the chronicle of judges). The age of Joshua is given at his death as 110 (Jud 2:8). He was a peer of Caleb who was 40 when they went to spy out the land. Caleb was 85 after the initial conquest of Canaan was completed (Josh 14:10). If Joshua was 45 when he accompanied Caleb, that would make Joshua about 85 when he began to judge Israel. That means Joshua would have judged Israel about 25 years. Based on 0 years for Shamgar who was likely a contemporary of Ehud and 25 years for Joshua we establish the following table for the length of the judges.

Judges for 450 years Acts 13:19 KJV

Date left Egypt		1556 BC left Egypt (Based on Clarke) 1491 BC (based on Begrich)
Moses	40 yrs (Num 14:33)	
Date entered Canaan		1516 BC (Clarke) 480 years from conquest to dedication of temple + 25 yrs for conquest. or 1466 BC based on J. Begrich's date for Solomon's reign. This later date has better archeological support.
Joshua	~25 yrs (Jud 2:8) 110 at death (Jud 2:8) ~85 entering promised land (450 years from death of Joshua to death of Samuel--Acts 13:20)	
Othniel	40 yrs Jud 3:11	
Ehud	80 yrs Jud 3:30	
Shamgar	Contemporary with Ehud and part of 80 years?	
Deborah	40 yrs Jud 5:31	
Gideon	40 yrs Jud 8:28	200 yrs since first judge
Abimelech	3 yrs Jud 9:22	
Tola	23 yrs Jud 10:2	
Jair	22 yrs Jud 10:3	248
Jephthah	6 yrs Jud 12:7	
Ibzan	7 yrs Jud 12:9	
Elon	10 yrs Jud 12:11	

Abdon	8 yrs Jud 12:14	279
Samson	20 yrs Jud 16:31	
Eli	40 yrs Jud 4:18	339 1152 BC (1102 BC, Begrich) Eli died at 98, not of old age, but with a broken neck. Samuel a "boy" (I Sam 3:1) shortly before Eli's death. Became judge a few years after warning Eli (I Sam 3:19). Was prophet as child. Became judge at maybe 17.
Samuel	57 yrs to coronation	396 Samuel 74 ("old" I Sam 8:1,5) (+25 Joshua + 29 After Saul = 54 --> 450 Samuel judged 86 years [I Sam 7:15]) 1066 BC (1016 BC, Begrich) Samuel died at age of ~103-Near end of reign of Saul I Sam 28:3-5 Samuel's death recent
Saul	40 yrs	436 1095 BC Clarke/1045 BC (Begrich)
David	40 yrs	476 1055 BC Clarke/1005 BC (Begrich)
Ark returned		
Solomon's temple	4 yrs	480 years from conquest to Solomon's temple (I Ki 6:1) 1011 BC (Clarke) 961 BC (Begrich)

Modern scholars place Solomon's temple somewhat later than Clarke. The whole chronology can be shifted forty or fifty years toward Christ without affecting the harmony. That would place Solomon's temple at 961 BC (Solomon began rule in 926 BC, J. Begrich) and the conquest would then be 1441 BC with the entrance into Canaan being 25 years earlier or 1466 BC. Moses would have left Egypt 40 years earlier or 1506 BC. This later date for the conquest harmonizes better with the archeological evidence.

Modern versions render Acts 13:16-20 applying to Abraham, the descent into Egypt, the Exodus, and the Conquest. It is 450 years from call of Abraham to conquest of Canaan by this rendering.

Call of Abraham	2016 (Based on Begrich's date of Solomon)
-----------------	---

Exodus	1531
Crossed Jordan	1491
Joshua's Conquest of Canaan	1466 Joshua's died at 110
From call of Abraham to Conquest 450 years (Acts 13:20)	

Either way Acts 13 is rendered it yields an intelligible chronology for the judges. Modern scholars have favored the NIV rendering because it relieves the pressure on the dates of the judges. Liberal theologians want to place the exodus at about 1250 BC which of course does not allow for 450 years of judges. There is archeological evidence for the early date that allows for the 450 years of judges. While Garstang found scarabs in the graves at Jericho depicting Pharaohs who lived in the 15th century BC, he did not find any from the 14th or 13th century as the late date for the Exodus would suggest. No pottery from these centuries was found either while extensive specimens from the 15th century BC and earlier were discovered.

After the ark was captured, the Philistines took their trophy back to Philistia. It went first to Ashdod and they placed it in the temple of Dagon, their national god. God showed his disdain for dumb idols by causing the image of Dagon to fall down on its face before His ark. The Philistines carefully replaced Dagon and fastened him securely back in his dominant position. The following morning Dagon was again prostrate before the ark of God, and this time God had cut off his hands and his head in a straight line where Dagon had fallen across the threshold of the alcove in which he was fastened. Effects of that incident persisted for centuries in the worship of pagan gods. The worshippers jumped across the threshold because of what happened to Dagon before the ark of God. Today, little school children unwittingly perpetuate the effects of this ancient incident in their "step on a crack and break your mommy's back" chant.

God's displeasure at the Philistine's treatment of His ark soon manifested itself in sore plagues that broke out in Ashdod. Commentators have suggested the plague was black leprosy, boils, and hemorrhoids, but no one really knows for sure. What is known is that it was so severe that people were dying from it. It was so severe that Ashdod decided the ark would be better kept at Gath. Well, Gath didn't fare any better than Ashdod, and Gath soon asked that the ark be removed to Ekron. Ekron soon learned what it was like to hold an inhospitable ark of God and summoned a council to decide what must be done with this plague bearing artifact.

The Philistine priests and diviners soothed that the ark should be returned to Israel on a new cart drawn by two milk cows with calves. A golden trespass offering was included with the ark and the cows were turned loose to see which way they would go. The Philistines separated the calves from the two cows pulling the cart. Now a cow's nature is to seek her calf when they are separated, but these two cows went on a beeline toward Israel, lowing as they went. When they got inside Israel, the cows stopped and waited for the men of Beth-shemesh to discover what God had just delivered. Unfortunately for Beth-shemesh, these Jews forgot their manners and let their curiosity overcome them. They looked into the

ark and God smote a bunch of them. I say "bunch" because there is a huge variation in readings at this place. The KJV reads "50,070". The NIV reads "70". More on this in a moment.

Because of the calamity precipitated by their impious handling of the ark, Beth-shemesh besought Kirjath-jearim to come and get the ark. They did so, and I Sam 7:2 says that the ark stayed in Kirjath-jearim for 20 years. This number seems to be to be totally untenable in light of other biblical statements, and I embarked on this study as a result of the incongruity of this date. I could find no other mention of this discrepancy, though I am sure someone somewhere has noticed it. If we accept the 20 years of I Sam 7:2, notice what it does to our carefully constructed chronology presented above.

Eli's age when Samuel born: 18

Not possible-Eli had two grown sons (I Sam 2:22)

Age Eli Became Judge: 58

40 years (I Sam 4:18)

Eli's age when Saul becomes king: 78

Samuel "old" 60?

Eli "very old" I Sam 2:22

Saul contemporary with Eli for 20 years (Acts 13:21)

(Saul ruled 40 yrs)

Age Eli At Death: 98

Ark Taken 20 years (I Sam 7:2) in Kirjath-jearim

Saul slain

David rules and fetches ark (II Sam 6:3)

Since Acts 13:21 says Saul was king for 40 years and David became king after the death of Saul, the earliest that David could have moved the ark from Kirjath-jearim was in his first year. That means if I Sam 7:2 is correct, that Saul began to reign while Eli was still living, and that Samuel was never really a judge at all. However, the Bible says that the ark was at Kirjath-jearim a long time (I Sam 7:2) and that Samuel was old (I Sam 8:1) when he anointed Saul king.

If we allow Samuel to be an "old" 60 when Saul was anointed, it means that Eli was only 18 when Samuel came to live with him in the temple. At that time Eli would have had two grown sons and the Bible says he was "very old" at 18. It cannot be possible.

If we take the 20 years to be correct, we have no period when Samuel alone was judge of Israel as he clearly was for a time. I Sam. 7 recounts some of the activities of Samuel during this period when he was judge. There was the notable battle of Ebenezer when God fought for Israel and sorely discomfited the Philistines. In fact, the rout was so bad that the holy writ says that Philistia was subdued, they came no more in the land of Israel, and there was peace between Israel and the Amorites (I Sam 7:13-14). This positively does not sound like the reign of Saul when he fought the Philistines almost continuously for 40 years.

A further fact that mitigates against the 20 years of I Sam 7:2 is I Chron 13:3. There the inspired writer says of the ark that Israel, "Enquired not at it in the days of Saul". Yet if the 20 years is correct, the ark

was in Shiloh for 20 years of his reign where Eli was priest and ministered at the ark continually. Another fact that makes the 20 years of I Sam 7:2 unlikely is in I Sam 14:2. There the writer says, "And Saul abode... in Migron: ... and Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of Jehovah in Shiloh, wearing the ephod" (I Sam 14:2). This verse says Ichabod's nephew was a grown man serving as a priest during the days of Saul. But Ichabod was born the day of Eli's death (I Sam 4:18-21) when the ark was taken. It is highly unlikely that Ichabod's brother was a grown man with grown children when Ichabod was born.

Notice also another fact. In I Sam 7:2 Eleazar son of Abinadab was consecrated to keep the ark. However, 20 short years later we find it is Uzzah and Ahio who are sons of Abinadab commissioned to care for the ark (II Sam 6:3). More likely they were descendants of Abinadab in a succession of priests who cared for the ark at Kirjath-jearim.

There is a variant reading of the text that has a bearing on the problem of I Sam 7:2. I Sam 14:18 is rendered, "Bring hither the ark of God..." in most versions. However, the ASV notes an alternate reading, "Bring hither the ephod...". That reading makes a lot more sense for two reasons. First, I Chron 13:3 says that Saul did not seek the ark. Second, I Sam 7:2 says the ark was long at Kirjath-jearim, but here a few short years later we find the ark at Gibeah. It was not long at Kirjath-jearim if it soon moved to Gibeah. Furthermore, we find the ark still at Kirjath-jearim a hundred and twenty years later when in II Sam 6:4 David comes to remove it to Jerusalem.

There is a problem with place names here. First, II Sam 6:1 calls Kirjath-jearim by its old Canaanite name, Baale-judah. Kirjath-jearim is called Kirjah-baal or Kirjath-jearim in Josh 15:60. It is also called Baalah in Josh 15:9 and I Chron 13:6. The KJV also mentions Gibeah at Kirjath-jearim. Consulting a good Bible atlas shows that the two cities have separate locations. A possible explanation is that "gibeah" means "hill" and it is so translated in the ASV and NIV. Apparently Abinadab's house was in a hill in a high place in Kirjath-jearim.

The difficulty of the ark being 20 years at Kirjath-jearim seems to have been glossed over by Keil and Delitzsch (K&D). They accommodate the 20 years of I Sam 7:2 by allowing it to be the time that the ark stayed in Kirjath-jearim until the battle of Ebenezer (I Sam 7:12). I can find no reason whatever to take the 20 years to be from Eli until that battle. The ark is not mentioned in connection with that battle nor does I Sam 7 say anything about the ark residing in Kirjath-jearim until a battle. In fact we find it there still in the house of Abinadab over a hundred years later (II Sam 6:3).

How then can this 20 years be explained? Unless one accepts the explanation of K&D, it appears that the number "20" is corrupted. It cannot be correct since it cannot be harmonized with the chronology of that period.

If we look at I Sam 6:19, we can gain some insight into the problems with Hebrew numbers. That passage is variously rendered 50,070 or 70. There are other similar problems with the Hebrew text involving numbers as Hebrew numbers are a source of numerous textual problems in the OT. In the Masoretic text they are written out in long hand and were transmitted faithfully for thousands of years. However, before the rise of the faithful Masorites, there was an earlier period of time when the

manuscripts were transmitted by copyists as the need arose and there were people with the interest and money to pay for it. These earliest manuscripts apparently also used an alphabetic method of writing numbers. This earliest method of writing Hebrew numbers is referred to in Unger's Bible Dictionary ("Number", p799). While Unger's Bible Dictionary does not go into any specific detail on the problems with Hebrew numbering it does have one pithy remark which states that because of the alphabetic method of early Hebrew numbering, the numbers were misunderstood by copyists and translators. It is the author's view that the number "20" in the text in I Sam 7:2 was in fact misunderstood and miscopied at some point in its history as it cannot be correct as it stands.

It is the author's firm belief that the scriptures are inspired and inerrant. We must deal with reality, however, and note that there are some problems with the text. I Sam 7:2 appears to be one of them. The other dates in the scriptures combine to provide an accurate and relatively clear picture of this period of the judges. This number, however, is a glaring inconsistency that is not easily reconciled. On the basis of the chronology developed above, it seems a more reasonable reading would be "120".

By James Johnson
From Expository Files 4.8; August 1997

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The King, the Prophet, and God's House

2 Samuel 7:1-16

It seemed like a good idea to everyone. David, the king of Israel, decided a change needed to be made. Nathan, the prophet, thought it sounded good. Certainly David's motive was good. Ever since before entering the promised land and establishing a new nation, for about five hundred years, the worship of God centered around the tabernacle. This was a movable tentlike structure which had been built by Moses about five centuries before. It was needful that such a structure be portable because the Israelites were on their way from where they had been liberated from slavery in Egypt to the land God had promised them as Abraham's descendants.

Those wilderness travels were now a part of the distant past. David decided to build a more permanent structure for the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem. He would build God's house, or temple. Who could doubt that David was the one to do it? He was described as "a man after God's own heart." And God had blessed the nation with victory over its enemies and prosperity. It seemed the least that a righteous king could do for God.

David's Desire

"Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.' And Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you.'" (2 Samuel 7:1-3). Now, it seemed to both David, the king, and Nathan, the prophet that David's idea was something to go with. In fact, Nathan does not even consult the Lord about it. At David's suggestion, Nathan, apart from inspiration, assures David that the Lord is with him in this endeavor. He was not speaking from God. He was not being "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21). He was simply following his impulse that such a plan must be a good thing.

God's Answer

"But it came about in the same night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, 'Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord,' Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 'Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'''" (2 Samuel 7:4-7).

Though David was sincere and genuine, and though it seems that he probably had a good and commendable idea, the Lord quickly let both Nathan and David know that such was not the case. The first mistake David made was thinking that God needed him, or at least needed a house in which He could dwell. The Lord says He does not really need one (see Acts 17:24,25). But secondly, and more seriously, David presumed what God wanted. He assumed that he should be the one to build God a house. Often people today presume what God wants rather than seek out the answers in His word, the Scriptures. There is lesson after lesson in the Bible illustrating the need to stay with the Lord's word and not to presume beyond that (1 Samuel 15:22,23; Matthew 15:9).

But why not David? God has His reason. We'll look at that in a moment.

God's Promise

"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. "And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." " (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

This a a very touching passage. In it, to comfort David in what must be a very big disappointment, God gives certain assurances. It was not that God did not approve of David any longer, or that He was displeased with David. He gives David magnificent promises concerning his descendant and kingdom. But who is the fulfillment of these promises? Is it Solomon, David's immediate son, or Jesus, David's future descendant. The answer: They both do! The Lord God will use Solomon and his building of the physical temple to be a pattern of what David's future Descendant will do when He builds a spiritual temple, the church (See Matthew 1:1; Acts 2:29-33; Hebrews 1:8). In these promises, some are fulfilled by Solomon, some by Jesus, and some by both. Solomon would reign as King in Israel, Jesus would reign as king over his spiritual kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Solomon would build a temple in Jerusalem, Jesus would build His out of living stones from all over the world (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5).

But Why Not David?

"Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, "My son, I had intended to build a house to the name of the Lord my God. "But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood, and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth before Me. 'Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. 'He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.' (1 Chronicles 22:6-10).

David had fought wars, and God did not want a man to had shed so much blood to build His house. David had done what had been necessary for him to do, and this ought not to be thought of as a punishment, but rather as a clear message of the peace God desires among men. But that age is past.

Jesus has built an even better house for God.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 8.4; April 2001

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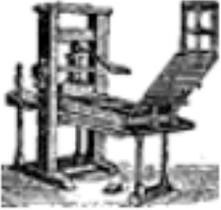
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The Throne of David

2 Samuel 7:12-16

"The LORD has sworn to David, A truth from which He will not turn back; 'Of the fruit of your body I will set upon your throne.'" (Psalm 132:11). The Psalm from which this statement is taken is of a group of Psalms that were used in worship at the temple of God at Jerusalem. They were each called "A Song of Ascent" and this one asks for the Lord to bless the sanctuary, or temple, sometimes referred to as "Zion" after the mount upon which it was built in Jerusalem.

But this Psalm is also prophetic in nature, referring to a promise the Lord had made to David through the prophet Nathan years before. The promise had involved the establishment of a permanent king who would sit down on the throne of David forever. This King would be a descendant of David.

Where do we look for the fulfillment of this promise? Has it been fulfilled as yet, or is it something to be fulfilled in the future. Many look for a future fulfillment in which Jesus will come back to literal Zion and rule from Jerusalem on David's throne.

Nathan's Prophecy Concerning David's Throne

[From the LORD through His prophet Nathan to King David] "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who shall come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness will not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-16). This prophecy at first presents the Bible student with an interesting question; "Is this prophecy about David's descendant Solomon or about his later descendant Jesus?" The answer must be: "BOTH"!

Building the Lord's house (vs. 13). In one sense, it is Solomon who built the Lord's house when he built the temple at Jerusalem. But Jesus also built a house for God; made of living stones; a spiritual temple; the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4,5).

The establishment of the descendant's kingdom (vs. 12). The Lord did establish Solomon's kingdom. Under Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel prospered, reaching its zenith. But the physical kingdom of Israel was not established "forever" as it does not exist today. However, it did give birth to God's

spiritual kingdom. Jesus established this kingdom (Mark 9:1; John 18:36; Colossians 1:13) and it is indeed eternal and "cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:22-29).

Iniquity and correction (vs. 14). Solomon did fall away for a time. The Lord did correct him and he came back to God. Some of the most thought-provoking writings of the wise man Solomon are made about his mistakes and what he learned from them. However, Jesus had no sin Himself (Hebrews 4:15). But he did suffer correction "with the rods of men and strokes of the sons of men" for our sins. He bore our sins on the cross, paving the way for our redemption (Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

In either case, whether Solomon or Jesus, we find that Nathan's prophecy has indeed been fulfilled. This is not a prophecy about a kingdom yet to be established in our future when Jesus comes again. King Jesus is already reigning over His kingdom (Revelation 1:5,9).

How The Prophecy Has Been Fulfilled

"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that He both died and was buried, and His tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." (Acts 2:29-33). According to the Holy Spirit, communicating through Peter and the apostles, the promise to "seat one of (David's) descendants upon his throne" was fulfilled by the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the right hand of God. "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-this Jesus whom you crucified" (vs. 36).

The Hebrew writer refers to Nathan's prophecy as being fulfilled as well; "For to which of the angels did He say, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee'? and again, 'I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me'?" and "But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne, o God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.'" (Hebrews 1:5,8).

Putting It All Together

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matthew 16:28). Jesus said this in the first century. Jesus said that those living in the first century would "see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." We have already cited in this article many verses speaking of the kingdom of Jesus as already being in existence in the first century following His death, burial and resurrection. Jesus Himself had explained that the kingdom which He would establish in the first century was spiritual in nature, and we find that men and women who subjected themselves to His rule were made partakers in His spiritual kingdom.

We have seen that Jesus has sat down on David's spiritual throne, ruling over spiritual Zion, a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

But wait. The Hebrew writer in one of the passages already cited (Hebrews 12:22-29) talks of the final

destruction of the physical heaven and earth (vss. 26,27). What will happen to this eternal kingdom of which we believers are a part when the final hour has passed? How will it continue to stand when the very cosmos is removed from existence?

The answer is that Jesus is coming again. When He comes, the citizens of His kingdom shall rise, bodies changed to that which is spiritual, immortal and incorruptible. Then Jesus will gather His kingdom together and take us home. You see, He is not coming again to establish His kingdom, but to deliver it up to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:23-26).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 3.7; July 1996

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Absalom Complex

2 Samuel 14:25 - 18:18

It is a remarkable thing how our culture's heroes are treated when they fall. It seems as if these idols, whether musicians, athletes, artists, actors or politicians, can do no wrong when it comes to their admirers. Oh, and we must include preachers in that list as well! I can hardly believe that anyone would continue to send money to proven scoundrels, but many do.

Many of these people become tragic figures. They make a mess of things by immoral and unwise behavior, but because they could run with a football or sing(?) or act or gain favors for their constituents on capitol hill they are still thought of as heroes to be admired. I do not mean to diminish from their accomplishments, its just that being a celebrity brings a greater responsibility to behave morally, decently and honestly, not less. Jesus said that greater potential brings greater responsibility (MATTHEW 25:14-30).

Whether drug overdoses, alcoholism, suicide, fraud, adultery, wife-beating or even murder, it seems as if many are willing to say, "Its O.K.; look at all those past accomplishments." Its not O.K. It never has been. Consider the Scripture's account of Absalom, the son of David.

PHYSICALLY GIFTED

"Now in all Israel there was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him." (II SAMUEL 14:25). Physically, Absalom was blessed. He was admired by all; everyone wanted to "be like Absalom." He had all the things people in those positions usually have when others look longingly at them with wonder and awe and wish they could switch places.

In addition to his good looks, Absalom was smart; a very clever fellow; cunning and crafty. He was very good at persuasion, and had a likeable personality and great charm (15:6). He had authority, being the son of the king. He had material wealth.

So, what could possibly go wrong? Plenty! There was a sharp contrast between Absalom's physical beauty and his spiritual poverty. His blessings were not his downfall, but rather his lack of spirituality was. He did not have what it takes within, and it is what is within that the Lord considers most important

(I SAMUEL 16:7).

VENGEFUL MIND

"And Absalom commanded his servants, saying, 'See now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then put him to death. Do not fear; have not I myself commanded you? Be courageous and valiant.'" (II SAMUEL 13:28). Amnon deserved what he got. He was not an innocent man. He was guilty of forcing himself upon Tamar, Absalom's sister and his own half-sister.

But note that Amnon's murder took place two years after the deed. For two years Absalom planned, not speaking one word to Amnon, good or bad. He waited, plotted his revenge, arranged the circumstance and then gave the order. To look at him, no one would guess what he was harboring within his vengeful heart.

Absalom was not what he seemed to be. On the outside he was a sight to behold. He pretended also to be something on the inside which he was not. He was a great pretender. He willingly manipulated others to get what he wanted (II SAMUEL 15:2-5). Absalom's first priority was to make you think that he was interested in you, when really he was only interested in himself.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

"So when Joab came to the king and told him, he called for Absalom. Thus he came to the king and prostrated himself on his face before the king, and the king kissed Absalom." (II SAMUEL 14:33). Absalom had been in hiding in a foreign land because of his murder of Amnon. He wanted to go back home. Would King David forgive Absalom, his son, for the murder of Amnon, also David's son, and receive him back? Absalom sent Joab to David to inquire, and David invited Absalom to come home.

As Absalom enters into King David's presence, he humbles himself bowing face down to the ground. It is a time of reckoning. Is his repentance genuine? Is he ready to become the productive son he could be? Is he ready to be faithful to God, the king, and Israel? He can. It is his choice.

Sadly, Absalom has no intention of living like he ought. All this was simply another show, with Absalom's ultimate goal being to overthrow his own father. He let this opportunity of a fresh and honorable start slip by, seemingly hardly noticing it at all. Just like far too many today, who insist on continuing on the path that leads to destruction (MATTHEW 7:13,14).

BOASTFUL, PROUD AND UNREPENTANT

"Now it came about that after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men as runners before him." (II SAMUEL 15:1). This man knew how to make an entrance! Absalom began to undermine his father's authority while advancing his own (15:1-6). David's love, patience and mercy for Absalom was not at all appreciated. Absalom was blinded by his ambition. He was full of pride and his thirst for glory could not be satisfied.

Our heavenly Father is also patient. Often, men take his patience as a license to live in rebellion against Him. Such stubborn unrepentance will only result in wrath and judgment, tribulation and distress (ROMANS 2:4-11).

OPEN REBELLION

"But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel saying, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" (II SAMUEL 15:10). Absalom had asked his father for permission to go to Hebron and worship the Lord. He said that he had made a vow to serve the Lord. This, no doubt, made David very happy. But it was a lie. Absalom's lies had sunk to a new low (15:7-10). Absalom was going to Hebron not to worship God, but to rebel against God's anointed one, the King of Israel. Events transpired quickly, and Absalom, through intrigue of various sorts, amassed enough power to drive David from Jerusalem and into hiding (15:13,14). But already David was gathering his supporters who were scattered and caught by surprise. Absalom, for all his plans, had gained a temporary upper hand. But it was only temporary, for men of such natures can build nothing that is worthwhile or lasting.

THE FINAL DOWNFALL

"Now Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. For Absalom was riding on his mule, and his mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. And his head caught fast in the oak, so that he was left hanging between heaven and earth, so that the mule that was under him kept going... Then Joab said, 'I will not waste time here with you.' So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak." (II SAMUEL 18:9,14). The battle had gone bad for Absalom. He had not foreseen that. He met up with servants of David on his escape route. He hadn't foreseen that, either. Nor had he foreseen getting his head caught in the tree. Nor that his old friend, Joab, would run him through with three spears.

There are many things that people like Absalom do not see. They do not see that there are awful consequences for living godless lives. They do not understand that those who rebel against God cannot win. Oh, to be sure, they may enjoy temporary gains, but they cannot win.

Absalom could have accomplished so much. What a waste! How often it happens today. Serving God is the only reasonable alternative to this kind of utter failure.

"Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar which is in the King's Valley... he named the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's monument to this day." (II SAMUEL 18:18). He could have left so much more. Just like those today who are exalted to celebrity status in our own nation while living lives of degradation and ruin. Whatever monuments they leave to us when they pass from the scene, it could have been so much more.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 1.9; September, 1994

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Something Greater Than Solomon is Here

(1 Kings 8)

Jesus said, "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." (Matthew 12:42). Notice that last part of Jesus' statement: "Something greater than Solomon is here." Solomon was the son of David and became the third king of Israel. He was known for his wisdom in governmental affairs; he ran the country well and it prospered and grew under his leadership. Though Solomon would become lax in matters of faith later in his life, and make some tragic mistakes, as a ruler his wisdom was supreme.

Solomon built the first temple at Jerusalem. There are some good lessons to be learned from the dedication of the new temple.

The Ark of the Covenant

"Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim made a covering over the ark and its poles from above. But the poles were so long that the ends of the poles could be seen from the holy place before the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen outside; they are there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt." (1 Kings 8:6-9).

The ark of the covenant was brought into the Most Holy Place in the inner sanctuary of the temple. At this time, a cloud filled the house of the Lord (vs. 11). Numerous sacrifices were being made (vs. 5). What a great temple Solomon had built!

But "something greater than Solomon" is here. It is a greater temple built by the Son of God. Today, it is the people of God who make up His temple as He dwells in our hearts by faith. Paul wrote: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; see also 1 Corinthians 3:16). Peter said, "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5).

You see, a temple is a prepared place for God to dwell. So it is with the spiritual temple of God. We ought to understand that we speak in accommodative terms in that God did not literally occupy physical space in Solomon's temple, but His presence was there in a unique sense. That is also true of His spiritual temple today; His people.

We also note that the spiritual temple is involved today with sacrifices which continue to be offered unto God. Paul said, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2; see also Hebrews 13:16). Solomon's temple might have been awesome to behold, but "something greater than Solomon is here!"

Solomon's Speech

Solomon covers several aspects of Israel's relationship with God in his speech to them. The nature of the temple itself is defined. Solomon also reminded them of David's desire to build the temple, but how that God had given that task to Solomon instead. He reminded them of Egypt. He reminded them of the covenant that God had made with them. (1 Kings 8:12-21).

The point is that God keeps all of His promises to us. He had given certain promises to Israel concerning the land in which they now dwelled and had fulfilled them all (Joshua 24:14-16; 21; 24-28). He kept His covenant with them and expected them to also keep their side of it as well.

Today we live under a new covenant with the very same God. He expects the same out of us; to keep the covenant (Hebrews 8:1-13). God has made even better promises to us in this covenant. But, as with the first covenant, the promises of God are conditioned upon our continued faithfulness (Hebrews 3:6; 13-14; 10:23). Jesus is the source of eternal life to all who obey Him! (Hebrews 5:9). We have a better covenant. Yes, "something greater than Solomon is here!"

Solomon's Prayer

Solomon also offered a public prayer before the altar at the dedication of his new temple. This prayer can be found in 1 Kings 8:22-53. He knelt on his knees and prayed, acknowledging dependence upon God (1 Kings 8:30). He petitioned God to hear the prayers of the people for mercy and forgiveness (1 Kings 8:33-36). Solomon also acknowledged that he understood that God did not literally take up space in the temple. He said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! (1 Kings 8:27).

Prayer is a very special privilege for God's people. But those who served as Solomon's high priests were men, mortal and sinful, just like himself. They would die, and need to be replaced.

But not so with our mediator (1 Timothy 2:15), advocate (1 John 2:1) and high priest. Jesus is our authority in prayer. It is in the name of the Son of God that we offer our prayers. He has no sins, and

does not die. He lives forever to make intercession for us. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:11-12). Yes, "something greater than Solomon is here!"

Blessing the Congregation

"May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, which He commanded our fathers." (1 Kings 8:57-58).

Solomon asked for both God's continued blessings as well as the people's continued faithfulness. Those two things are related, then as well as now. He also said, "...so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else." (1 Kings 8:60). Like then, our faith will cause others to know of our relationship with God. Remember, "something greater than Solomon is here!"

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 11.2, February, 2004

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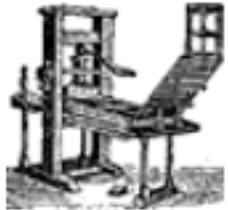
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

A King's Heart

1 Kings 11

Shocking And Tragic

Somehow, 1 Kings 11 is never expected. The chapter is always shocking and tragic to read. It is shocking due to the previous chapters that mention the wisdom and faith of Solomon. His speech and prayer of dedication at the temple in 1 Kings 8 is a remarkable address of admonition for the people and supplication toward God. We would never expect the events of 1 Kings 11 to transpire. But they do - and that is the tragedy. The writer sums up the tragedy in these words: "Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord, as did his father David" (1 Kings 11:6).

The Heart Of The Matter

How could this happen? How could this wise man turn away from God? The answer comes early in chapter 11. A commandment from God was disobeyed (11:1-2). What was the result? Solomon's heart was turned away from God (11:3). The writer seems to pay special attention to Solomon's heart (11:3, 4, 9). Solomon was no longer the servant of God (8:30, 52) that he once was. His heart was no longer right with God.

Lessons From Solomon's Heart

- 1. Practice What You Preach!* Solomon had once said, "Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day" (1 Kings 8:61). He preached about loyal hearts, but sometime later, his heart was not loyal to the Lord (11:4).
- 2. God Wants All Of Our Heart!* The ESV says that Solomon's heart "was not wholly true to the Lord his God" (1 Kings 11:4). A divided heart is at odds with God. He wants it all.
- 3. Disobedience Brings About Despicable Actions!* God told Solomon that part of the kingdom would be given to his servant Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:11, 28, 31). What was Solomon's reaction to God's message? The writer says, "Solomon therefore sought to kill Jeroboam" (1 Kings 11:40). Sound familiar? Solomon is acting more like Saul than his father David. His despicable behavior is appalling!

4. A Father's Godly Instruction Should Be Obeyed! David told Solomon to walk in the ways of God and keep His statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies (1 Kings 2:2-3). Sadly, Solomon did not take heed to his father's godly instruction.

5. We Must Always Obey God! Solomon knew what God expected from him (1 Kings 9:1-9; 11:2). He could offer no excuses. He could not plead ignorance. Solomon directly disobeyed God.

Solomon's heart was not right with God. His life was not right as a result. "Get your heart right," a preacher from a generation ago told me, "And your life will be right." Applications abound. What about us? Will we learn from Solomon's heart?

By Jay Taylor
From Expository Files 14.7; July 2007

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A Sad Page In History

(1 Kings 12:25-33)

The divided kingdom period in Old Testament history is not an easy narrative to follow and learn. You can read and study the history of the Northern Kingdom, then read and study the history of the Southern Kingdom. Or, try to read and study about both in chronological order. In either case it is one of the most difficult sections of history to read. It can also be discouraging to read about God's people living in such self-created chaos.

Nevertheless, there are vital messages to learn from this history. The sin of idolatry is clearly defined. The emptiness of materialism is quickly perceived. We can observe in this period the danger of trusting in political alliances with nations and men. Positively, we are able to understand the value of remaining faithful to God, though there be few. The strength of trusting in God and finding encouragement with others who serve Him is apparent in this time. Most important, in the divided kingdom period, the faithfulness of God to His people is prominent. So, though there is challenge in the task, don't skip this part of Old Testament history.

Here's a key event that initiated the chaos of the divided kingdom:

1 Kings 12:25 - 33 (NKJV) 25Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. 26And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: 27If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah." 28Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" 29And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. 31He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. 32Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. 33So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense."

This was all about man! This was the fear and ambition of Jeroboam. This was about human rivalry, human convenience, human will and human weakness. This movement found its power in the readiness of men to worship according to their will instead of God's. Whenever this happens, in any dispensation, another sad page in history has been written.

By Warren E. Berkley
Front Page
From Expository Files 12.7; July 2005

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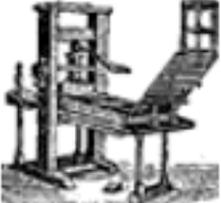
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Where's A Man of God When You Need One or Doh! I Knew That!

1 Kings 13:9

Where's a dependable man of God when you need one? After reading through the account of the duping of the man of God in 1 Kings 13, one might be tempted to ask that question.

The man of God had delivered a scathing rebuke to king Jeroboam and the northern nation of Israel for their idolatrous worship and had even refused a dinner invitation from the king himself for God had said, "You shall eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way which you came." (1 Kings 13:9) The stranger from Judah was intent on keeping that command. That is, until an old prophet met up with him.

By falsely saying that an angel told him it would be alright, the old prophet misled the man of God into disobeying God's express command. The man of God went to the old prophet's house to eat and drink. Even as they were eating, God's word (for real this time) came to the old prophet and rebuked the man of God for his disobedience. The duped man of God must have slapped himself on the forehead and said to himself, "I knew better than that! Why didn't I just obey God as He commanded me?" Further, his punishment was pronounced on the spot and carried out directly on his way home. Torn up by a lion and buried far from home, the man of God met a miserable end after having courageously proclaimed God's word to a disobedient king!

Where's a dependable man (or woman) of God when you need one? In a time when anything goes religiously, where are the men and women of faith who'll stand against a tide of lies and liars to simply obey God's commands? Perhaps they're conversing with angels who say "Following the gospel as revealed by Jesus and His apostles isn't all that necessary as long as you're sincere." Or maybe the angel is saying, "All paths lead to heaven anyway!" However, a real man of God said, "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" Then, for good measure, he repeats the same warning again! (Gal 1:8-9)

True, there are some who don't want to know the way of truth and just want to hear what they want to be

true. Then there are those who know the truth and disregard it such as the ones spoken of in 2 Peter 2:20-21. Read it for yourself; if you know better and get caught up in sin again, you'll be worse off than you were before.

The point is this: "To the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:17) However, the one who does what he knows is right will be blessed! (James 1:25) That's a promise from the Promise Keeper of all time! Be a real man or woman of God; listen and obey.

By Zeke Flores
From Expository Files 12.5; May 2005

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The Reign Of Asa

1 Kings 15:9-24

Many of the most interesting Bible lessons are learned from character studies. Some people think that reading about the kings of the Old Testament is very boring, but the fact is that there are some very interesting and important stories in this portion of the scripture. Most Bible students know that following the united kingdom of Israel, during which Saul, David, and Solomon reigned, the kingdom divided with the northern ten tribes becoming the nation of Israel under Jeroboam and the southern two tribes becoming the kingdom of Judah under Solomon's son Rehoboam. Some of the kings of these two Hebrew kingdoms were very good, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Others were very bad, such as Ahab, Ahaz, and Manasseh. Most of them were a mixture of good and bad, but all are recorded with a purpose in that which was "written before...for our learning" (Romans 15:4). In Judah, Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijam, who was in turn followed by his son Asa. The aim of this article is to examine the reign of Asa.

His Good Beginning

Notice Asa's good beginning in 1 Kings 15:9-15. "Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (verse 11). This means that he followed the way of the Lord, not his own way or that set by his two predecessors who were said to have done evil in the sight of the Lord. The way of man, which often seems right to many, will not lead us to please God but will result in death and destruction (Proverbs 14:12, Jeremiah 10:23).

There are not many ways to please God but only the way that is described as "strait" and "narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14).

As a result of this attitude, he destroyed idolatry and its various manifestations. "And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made" (verse 12). For "perverted persons" the King James Version has "sodomites," referring to homosexuals. Ritual acts of homosexuality were often associated with pagan idolatry and this is one reason why they were condemned in the Old Testament, along with idolatry in general (Exodus 20:1-5, Deuteronomy 23:17-18). Do we have idols today? Covetousness is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5). And the homosexual rights movement has certainly made an idol out of promoting diversity and tolerance for their ungodly lifestyle (Romans 1:26-27). So we must keep ourselves from any idol that would stand between us and God (1 John 5:21). But beyond this, we see that to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord means opposing all evil and sinful practices (Ephesians 5:11, 2 John 9-11). In addition, Asa did not let family

ties keep him from doing right. "Also he removed Maachah his grandmother from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah" (verse 13). His was not just a religion of convenience inherited from forefathers but of conviction in which he did not allow physical relationships to become more important than serving God. Today, people often refuse to obey the gospel because of devotion to a departed parent who never was baptized. Or they continue to attend a church involved in false doctrine or error because it was where their dear grandparents went. Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). And Asa restored right worship. "He also brought into the house of the LORD the things which his father had dedicated" (verse 15). Under the Mosaic covenant, the house of God was the temple in Jerusalem.

Today, we know that God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24). Under the new covenant of Christ, God's house is the church, a spiritual people rather than a physical building (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Timothy 3:15). As a part of God's church, we need to make sure that we are worshipping right, according to the teachings of Christ (John 4:24). Because of these fine attributes, Asa started his reign well.

His Mistakes

However, we find that Asa made some very serious mistakes in 1 Kings 15:16-22. What happened? There was war between Asa and Baasha, who was fortifying Ramah to embargo Judah. So in an attempt to protect his kingdom he "took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and...sent them to Ben-Hadad the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, 'Let there be a treaty between you and me...'" (verses 18-19). Asa trusted in political alliances for defense rather than in God. We must never rely upon political methods in our fight for the faith because "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Claiming to defend the truth, some resort to character assassination, smear campaigns, name-calling, and other dirty tactics which are of the world rather than of Christ. Instead, we should use the only offensive weapon that God gave us, and that is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

From a physical standpoint, the political alliance worked. "Now it happened, when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah, and remained in Tirzah" (verse 22). However, this would indicate that Asa must have decided that the end justifies the means. A lot of folks today seem to think the same thing. However, Paul plainly condemned the idea of "let us do evil that good may come" (Romans 3:8). While we are to wage a good warfare which includes standing against all evil and error, we never have a license to violate God's expressed will in the process, as this will cause our good to be spoken of as evil (Romans 14:16).

Asa also made another mistake. According to the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10, when God sent a seer named Hanani to rebuke Asa for his political alliance, the king was angry and put the prophet in prison. He did not like the message so he decided to get rid of the messenger. When the Jewish leaders did like the truth that Stephen spoke, they determined to get rid of the messenger by stoning him to death (Acts 7:51-60). Paul experienced the same attitude when some became his enemy because he told them the truth (Galatians 5:16). There are people like that today. When the preacher preaches the truth, such as on the subject of divorce and remarriage, and it hits home because there are some in the

congregation who are involved in unscriptural marriages, often the result is that the preacher gets fired. This is the same mistake that Asa made and it results from a wrong attitude towards God and His word.

His End

Asa experienced a horrible fate. "...But in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. So Asa rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father..." (verses 23-24). Why did he have such a terrible end? Again we go to 2 Chronicles 16:12 where we are told, "...Yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD but the physicians." This does mean that it is wrong to go to physicians but that in this case the physicians could not help one who had turned away from the Lord. The Lord wants all of us to seek Him throughout our lives because His ways are better than our ways (Isaiah 55:6-9).

Yet, this example shows the possibility of one who at one time was a faithful child of God not continuing to seek the Lord and thus losing a right relationship with God. In spite of what some in the religious world teach, it is possible for a Christian to fall. Paul warns us against it (1 Corinthians 10:12). He also cites examples of some in his day who did just that (Galatians 5:1-4). Because of this possibility, it is so important that we listen to the admonition of Hebrews 3:12-13, "Beware, 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 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

God may not strike sinners with physical illnesses as punishment today as He apparently did Asa and others in Bible days (like Herod in Acts 12:20-24). But He has a far worse punishment prepared for those who will not seek Him. They will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Asa's end, as will be true of everyone who is disobedient to God, was undesirable because of his sin. Why study about Asa, or any other Old Testament character for that matter? Is this not all just ancient history that does not concern us? The answer is, no, it is part of the "all scripture" which is "given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). There are several important lessons that are illustrated by Asa. We must always do what is right in the sight of God (Matthew 7:21). We must trust in God and His will rather than the ways of men (1 Corinthians 1:21). And we must seek the Lord all of our lives to avoid an undesirable end (Revelation 2:10). Thus, such a study can be profitable to everyone.

By Wayne S. Walker
From Expository Files 8.3; March 2001

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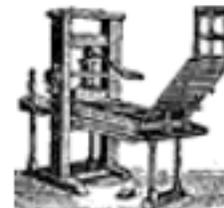


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It Was Only a Trivial Thing

1 Kings 16:25-33

Ahab was a king in Israel who led the people further away from God. The people had been drifting. Their kings had forsaken the commandment of God. God sent two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, to Israel during the time of Ahab. Ahab and his queen, Jezebel, plunged Israel to new lows both spiritually and morally. Ultimately, the nation would be destroyed for their infidelity and treachery.

Ahab Became King In Israel

Ahab was the son of the previous king of Israel by the name of Omri (1 Kings 16:28). Omri had been worse than all the kings that were before him. "Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, and acted more wickedly than all who were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols." (1 Kings 16:25-26).

Ahab did more to provoke God than all the kings before him, including his father, Omri. Concerning the reign of Ahab, the Bible says, "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him. It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria." (1 Kings 16:30-32). From this passage we learn that Ahab:

1. [Walked in the sins of Jeroboam](#) (vs. 31). Jeroboam was the first king of Israel after the division of the kingdom between Israel in the north and Judah in the south. While the descendants of David continued to reign in Judah at Jerusalem, Israel had it's own kings, priests and religion.
2. [He married a foreign woman, Jezebel](#) (vs. 31). She heavily influenced Ahab and the nation to engage in idolatry.
3. [He served and worshipped the pagan god, Baal](#) (vs. 31).
4. [He built an altar and house to Baal](#) (vs. 32).
5. [He made the Asherah, a female idol](#) (vs. 33).

Slipping Down the Slope

Evil accepted in one generation will likely grow in the next. Limits of the previous generation are pressed further by the next. Once Jeroboam had departed from the way of the Lord, though he retained many things, each following generation digressed further. We have seen similar trends in our own nation today. There may not often be great changes from one day unto the next, but over generations the changes have been significant. Consider the public school system, for example. At one time, the Bible was a textbook. The men who wrote the constitution recommended its use in the public schools, but now, the very document they wrote is being interpreted to exclude the Bible. The words of the constitution are the same, but society's attitude toward God has changed. No great change has occurred from one day to the next, but over time the change has been great. Yesterday's grievous sins become today's "trivial" matters.

It takes great courage for men and women of faith to continue to be faithful during such times. Paul wrote the following about this: "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come." and "Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:1; 10-13). He also said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." (2 Timothy 4:1,2). Our message and standard is the same, though society's standard constantly shifts.

An Imperfect Match Made in Hell

There are married couples who seem to be matches "made in heaven" but Ahab and Jezebel's was not one of them. Ahab was not faithful to begin with, but marrying Jezebel put an end to any hope he might ever be. He had at least a nominal respect for God, but she had absolutely none. He was weak to begin with, and she brought him the rest of the way down (1 Kings 16:31).

Whom we choose to marry will influence every aspect of our lives, including our service to God. Though Jezebel's evil influence on Ahab and the nation was significant, this must not be thought of as exonerating Ahab. Ahab is responsible for Ahab. We can do the bidding of evil men and women and suggest it was their influence that is the blame for our decisions. We are accountable. Ahab will answer to the Lord for his deeds, as Jezebel will for hers. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10).

God is Patient

The amazing thing is not that Israel would be destroyed for her lack of faith, but how many prophets with warnings God sent to her over two centuries to try and get her to repent! Israel had so much time to change her course. During Ahab's reign we read of Elijah and later Elisha's efforts. But there were also hundreds of others, many driven into hiding by severe persecution because they were calling the people

back to Jehovah (1 Kings 18:4).

As is often the case, as judgment came upon the nation, Israel complained that it was not fair and it was too harsh. "But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live." (Ezekiel 18:29-32).

That same message is true today. God is still patient. He wants us well and saved in eternity. His word will lead us to victory. Many in the world view not living according to the teachings of the Scripture as a "trivial thing" The Bible says concerning Ahab, "It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam..." (1 Kings 16:31). Do not let it be a trivial thing to you.

By Jon W. Quinn
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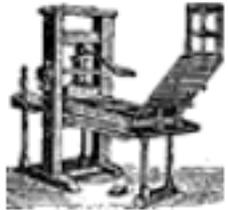
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

"What Doest Thou Here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19

First Kings 19 reveals Elijah in the cave of despondency. And well he might be! Nationally, Israel had forsaken God's covenant, the very foundation of her national existence. Religiously, they had thrown down God's altars and slain His prophets with the sword. Personally, Elijah alone was left as one who was jealous of Jehovah, and he was a hunted man - they were seeking his life to take it away.

We can sympathize with Elijah. Many of us have spent many hours in such a cave; some have hardly been out of it. The whole world has seemed to be a boiling cauldron belching forth new trouble with every bubble. Often our nation has seemed to totter on the brink of military embarrassment, of economic collapse and civil anarchy. True religion is on the decline. Many pulpits of the land are occupied by infidels and some of the Lord's bitterest enemies are among those who claim to be of His own household. The courts seem determined to establish humanism as the national religion and almost daily give new license to lasciviousness which flows like a flood into our lives through every avenue of communication. How dark the future appears for us and for our children! How difficult to resist the pressure!

God's Question

Read God's question two ways: First, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" You, the foil of Ahab and the frustration of Jezebel, God's champion on Mount Carmel, "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." And, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" What can you accomplish in this place and in this frame of mind?

Would not God question us in this same way? We profess that faith which "is the victory that overcomes the world." We claim identity with that great church which in 30 years changed the course of world history, and alliance with the same God who gave them that success. We claim possession of the same weapons, the same armor. What do we here in despondency? "For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

God's Encouragement

Elijah needed three things to remove him from the cave: First, he needed a revelation of God. It is just such a revelation that each of us needs - oh, not a literal miraculous vision, but a vision of God by faith. Despondency is weak faith; it is losing sight of "God amid the shadows;" it is forgetting that "the Most

High ruleth in the kingdoms of men." Faith, on the other hand, endures "as seeing Him that is invisible."

Elijah also needed a vision of his earthly fellowship. He was not, as he supposed, alone. He was but one of seven thousand who had not "bowed the knee unto Baal." Any idea today that "I, even I only, am left," is inexcusable. There are still relatively large congregations of devout, earnest Christians whose outstanding zeal makes them examples for us all. There are numberless smaller ones scattered throughout the world, relatively unknown, yet courageously letting their light shine in their dark corner. And how many saints there are who may be alone in their own world, but who in the Lord are joined hand in hand with "the whole family, in heaven and on earth." "Lord, open thou thy servants' eyes!"

Elijah desperately needed a renewed assurance of God's eventual victory over Baal and of his role in it. He was a disillusioned man and this was a major part of his problem. Enthusiasm and optimism go hand in hand. The zeal of the Galilean disciples was unbounded while they had visions of Jesus sitting on a throne in Jerusalem, but when His death dashed their hopes, they were consumed with disillusionment, explaining: "But we had hoped that it was he that should redeem Israel." The most fervent evangelism America has ever seen was more than a century ago among those who genuinely believed that the plea for restoration would eventually break down all denominational barriers and unite all believers. The most sacrificial and passionate efforts at world evangelism were in times when men possessed a vision of a world "full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea." But we have about decided that these things will never be. The church of our generation is an old man who has learned that the visions of youth are unrealistic. But by the Spirit of God, this old man can yet dream dreams - dreams of battles won, of conquest and victory in the name of the Lord.

God's Commission

Each time Elijah complained, God's response was, "Go!" He instructed him to anoint a new king over Israel, to appoint a new king over the enemy of Israel and to prepare Elisha to be prophet in his stead. "Go," says the Lord to us - "All authority has been given unto me." Renew allegiance to the throne in spiritual Israel. "Make disciples of all nations," thus making Jesus their king. And "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The battle soon will be theirs. God is not defeated - His purpose will be accomplished!

Scanned from CHRISTIANITY MAGAZINE, Sept. 1987

By Sewell Hall
From Expository Files 3.11; November 1996

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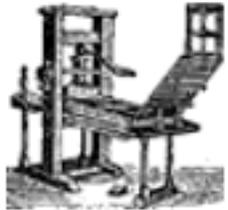
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Two Kings Receive Correction

1 Kings 20-21

Two kings sinned before God. Two prophets appeared to them to correct their errors. Their reactions were very different, showing a significant difference in the character of these two men.

The first man was Ahab, king of Israel (1 Kings 20 and 21). He was returning home after a great victory against Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria. A prophet met him on the road home and condemned him for failing to complete the mission God had given him. Instead of killing the arrogant king of Syria, Ahab had made a peace treaty and let him go. Ahab heard the words of the prophet and went home. On the way, he looked for some pleasant distraction from this divine rebuke. He offered to buy the beautiful vineyard of his neighbor, Naboth, but the owner would not sell. Ahab arrived at his home and sulked in self-pity and depression. He turned his back on the world, and on God. His evil wife, Jezebel, killed Naboth and his sons to try to ease the king's pain, but that evil plot backfired. God vowed to destroy the family of Ahab. His son was the last king from that evil family.

Three years later, another king returned from a battle (2 Chronicles 19). Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was also greeted by a prophet with an unpleasant message. He had gone to war against Syria as an ally of the wicked king of Israel, against the will of God. God spared Jehoshaphat's life, but sent Jehu the prophet to condemn his reckless action. Unlike Ahab, who sought to ease his pain by fulfilling selfish desires and wallowing in self-pity, Jehoshaphat accepted the Lord's rebuke. Instead of turning his back on God, he worked hard to be pleasing to God. He toured the nation and appointed judges throughout the land to help the people follow God's law. The same God who eliminated the family of Ahab established Jehoshaphat's descendents on the throne of Judah.

Two kings. Two rebukes. Two reactions. Two results. What do we learn? We can respond to correction and rebuke with self-justification, selfish ambitions and self-pity, thus turning our backs on God. Or, we can humbly accept rebuke and seek to draw closer to God and to encourage others to serve him more faithfully. Ahab died in battle as a result of his sin. Jehoshaphat died in peace as a result of his faithfulness.

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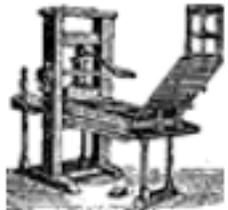
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Chariots of Fire

2 Kings 6:8-18

Ben-hadad was the king of Syria and constant enemy of Israel. His army was more powerful as he led his warriors into Israel to capture its armies and conquer. The account is found in 2 Kings 6:8-18. The time would come when, because of their unfaithfulness, that God would permit Assyria to conquer Israel, but the Lord was not finished sending prophets to Israel urging them to repent.

Ben-hadad planned his strategies with his generals in top secret. They would encamp in a certain place and do battle. Unfortunately for the Syrians, there plans always failed. Israel's armies were always someplace else. It was as if Israel had a spy.

Enraged that ambush after ambush failed, Ben-hadad calls his servants together and screams, "Will you tell me which one of us is for the king of Israel?" (vs. 11). Ben-hadad was certain that there was a spy in their midst.

There wasn't. One of the servants responded, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words you speak in your bedroom." (vs. 12).

Espionage can be tricky business, but there is no better spy than a prophet of God. Even Ben-hadad's bedroom is "bugged" as the Holy Spirit reveals to Elisha every detail of every plan.

Ben-Hadad correctly decides that in order win victory, he must get rid of Israel's eyes and ears. He must capture Elisha. "So he said, 'Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him.' And it was told him, saying, 'Behold, he is in Dothan.'" (2 Kings 6:13). Easier said than done!

Ben-hadad sent a great army of horses and chariots to surround the city of Dothan in the night. There would be no escape for Elisha. Elisha's servant rose early in the morning and went out of the house. He beheld the warriors completely surrounding the city and went to Elisha and said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" What Elisha said next must have startled the servant: "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (2 Kings 6:16). Who was Elisha talking about? Who was with them?

"Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17). All around them, but beyond the capabilities of the five human physical senses,

was all the protection necessary. Elisha would be no prisoner that day. His captors would be.

Consider three points from this incident.

The Enemy Has Surrounded Us

We live in a fallen world. There is evil on every side. There is sickness and temptation and sorrow. Tragedy and loss sometimes strikes. Problems with personal relationships, economic difficulties, personal failure. Finally, death comes to all.

In the words of Elisha's servant, "What shall we do?" The answer is found in faith.

Today, the enemy commander is not Ben-hadad, but Satan. The spears and darts come in the form of temptations and trials. He means to take us captive. Paul mentions some who had already been captured, and their need to be taught and encouraged to repent; "and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:26).

It is when the child of God, aware of God's presence in his or her life, faces down the adversary that his or her light shines the brightest (1 Peter 4:14-16; 2:12). God is glorified and the disciple is strengthened. There is assurance and peace even in the midst of evil. We need to dedicate ourselves to making the most of every situation to live godly knowing our Lord will give the victory (Ephesians 5:15-17; Philippians 1:12,13). Its time to don your armor! (Ephesians 6:10-12).

God Is Greater Than The Enemy

We also learn a good lesson from the response of Elisha to the "threat." The servant saw the odds as two versus a thousand. He forgot God in his equation. We must not do the same.

We are body and spirit. There is a physical realm and there is a spiritual realm. There is more to a man than the sum total of his physical parts (Matthew 10:28). There is more to our universe than just the things we can see with our eyes (Corinthians 10:3-5; 7; 4:16-18).

In Elisha's day, unseen by the physical senses was the providence of God. God is present in every situation where His child encounters the enemy.

Not everyone can see it, but God is there to support, protect and encourage. He will handle the situation if we will handle our faith. This does not mean an absence of suffering or even death, but it does mean absolute and final victory. God's people of faith might die, but they will live again. Every tear shall be wiped from their eyes.

And, by the way, man's final enemy is death. Then there are no more battles and no more enemies to face. By faith, the war is won forever.

God Will Deliver Us

The invaders sent from Ben-hadad were struck blind and led into the midst of Israel, where their sight is restored. Elisha instructs the king to feed them and send them home. This is done, and Ben-hadad becomes so terrified by the experience that he stops sending his marauding bands into Israel.

Elisha followed a course of three steps in all this. These three steps are well worth noting:

1) **Prayer** (2 Kings 6:17). This is the best first step in dealing with the enemy. There is more going on than just the things we see. There are chariots of fire doing battle in the spiritual realm (Revelation 6:9-11; Philippians 4:6,7)

2) **Faith**. The second step is faith. We have not seen the throne of God, but we believe He reigns and is in control. Recall how Stephen, just before his death, was permitted to view this realm (Acts 7:56). We shall join the Lord there one day (see also Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:1).

3) **Obedience**. The third step is obedience. This is how we build our houses on the rock (Matthew 7:24-27). These are the steps to take for victory, eternal in Christ.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 10.2, February, 2003

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Hezekiah and Isaiah

2 Kings 18:1-19; Isaiah 36-39

King Hezekiah, one of the most faithful kings of Judah, and the prophet Isaiah were contemporaries and faithful men of God. They lived in a time where the nation of Judah had suffered through long periods of unfaithfulness, and the revival of faith experienced during Hezekiah's reign was short-lived and incomplete as far as the population was concerned.

The Assyrian empire had overrun Syria and Israel. With the start of the reign of Sargon II, Assyria had conquered Samaria, the capital of Israel. His son, Sennacherib, then attacked Judah. His campaign in 701 BC failed due to God's intervention. The righteousness of king Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet were instrumental in Sennacherib's downfall.

Hezekiah's Early Reign

(2 Kings. 18:1-12)

Following the evil reign of Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, Judah had four good kings. However, they had not tear down their high places that had been used to worship idols.

The next king, Ahaz, who was Hezekiah's father, was evil. He became so degraded that he even sacrificed children as burnt offerings to pagan gods.

Hezekiah, however, did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and Judah prospered during his reign (2 Kings 18:1-8). He tore down the high places so they could only be used again if they were rebuilt. In fact, the people had even turned the bronze serpent that God had told Moses to make seven centuries before into an idol. So Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent (vs. 4).

God blessed Hezekiah so that he was able to break the Assyrian domination and defeat the Philistines as well (vs. 7,8). While the long faithless kingdom of Israel (Samaria) to the north was destroyed at this time, Judah to the south was spared 2 Kings 18:9-12).

God blesses those who obey him (see also Matthew 6:24; 7:7-11). Blessings come to the faithful in many ways; physical as well as spiritual. Many mistakenly consider the physical as more important than the spiritual (Matthew 6:19-21). Faith is living righteously; trusting that God will give what is necessary; and being content (Philippians 4:11-13).

The Proverb writer said that righteousness exalts a nation (Proverbs 14:34). That was true for Judah and it is true for our own nation today. But sin is a disgrace and will ultimately weaken and destroy a nation.

Those that live by faith have a good example in Hezekiah.

Sennacherib's Invasion (701 B.C.)

(2 Kings 18:13-19; Isaiah 36 and 37)

When Sennacherib invaded Judah, Hezekiah paid tribute to him, hoping to avoid a siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:14). Sennacherib, however, sent a large army to besiege Jerusalem in spite of the bribe attempt. He promised to deport the Jews to a "good" land, saying they had no hope. It was a beautiful piece of propaganda. Sennacherib first explained that it was hopeless to resist because their ally Egypt could not help them (2 Kings 18:20,21). He continued by stating that God would not help, since Hezekiah had torn down the high places, failing to understand that the high places had been torn down to please Jehovah (2 Kings 18:22). He then mocked Judah's military by saying that the warriors of Judah could not ride war horses, even if Assyria provided them (2 Kings 18:23). He then claimed that God had sent the Assyrians to destroy Judah (2 Kings 18:25). He reminded them that sieges meant food would become scarce and that they would starve (2 Kings 18:27). Sennacherib suggested that God could not save Jerusalem anymore than the gods of the other nations had saved their people (2 Kings 18:33). Finally, he painted a very rosy (an false) picture of how idyllic it would be to become Assyria's slaves (2 Kings 18:31,32).

Hezekiah sought God's help. Isaiah prophesied that the Assyrians would hear that Pharaoh Tirhakah was going to fight the Assyrians and return to Assyria (2 Kings 19:7-9). Assyrian records show that Sennacherib defeated Tirhakah at the battle of Eltekan in 701 B.C. Sennacherib subsequently sent a letter stating that God could not stop Assyria from conquering Jerusalem. Hezekiah "spread the letter before the Lord" and prayed for deliverance (2 Kings 19:14). God responded through Isaiah that the Assyrian army would be destroyed (2 Kings 19:32-34).

It was that very night that the angel of the Lord struck the Assyrians that night, killing 185,000 (2 Kings 19:35). As prophesied, Sennacherib returned to Nineveh where he was killed by two of his sons; this happened 20 years later. We in the Chicago area can travel to the University of Chicago and visit the Oriental Institute, a museum with many ancient artifacts on display, and see an ancient Assyrian record where Sennacherib boasts "I have shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage." Unfortunately for Sennacherib, his "caged bird" had a powerful God who delivered the captive. The Assyrian record is silent about the defeat at Jerusalem (ancient kings did not like their failures recorded).

We serve a God who is the ruler of all nations (Psalm 113:3,4; 115:1-9). Do not put your hope in the hopeless. Put it in the throne of the true and eternal Kings. He is also a God who loves and protects his faithful people, then and today (Psalm 37:27,28; 2 Timothy 4:17,18; 1:12; 1 Peter 1:5).

Hezekiah's Illness

(Isaiah 38)

Hezekiah became mortally ill, and without God's intervention he knew he would die (Isaiah 38:1). He wept and prayed for recovery. (Isaiah 38:2,3) God granted him an additional 15 years of life (Isaiah 38:4,5). This reminds us of how God hears the prayers of righteous people (James 5:16; 1 John 3:22). We need to live according to God's word and be confident of the purpose and power of prayer offered

according to the Lord's will..

Hezekiah's Foolishness

(Isaiah 39)

Hezekiah showed the treasures of his kingdom to the Babylonian king's envoys (Isaiah 39:1,2). That was a mistake. Hezekiah was righteous, but not perfect. The Babylonians evidently decided that one day those treasures would be theirs. God was displeased. Through Isaiah, God informed Hezekiah that his treasures would be carried to Babylon, along with some of his descendants (Isaiah 39:5,6).

What had led Hezekiah to show the treasures to the Babylonians? The answer was pride at his wealth. Many are too preoccupied with materialism and that often brings disaster ("He who dies with the most toys wins") How foolish! (2 Chronicles 32:31)!

Realize the value of your faith. And prove that you esteem it highly by your actions in putting spiritual things first (1 Peter 1:7).

As Sennacherib's envoys of old, often the world mocks God. "Don't be so foolish as to depend on God." The envoys sought to destroy the people's morale and trust. But there was strong leadership in Hezekiah and Isaiah and others. The envoys failed, and Sennacherib's boasting proved empty. So will the boasts of the world against God today. As Jesus said, "Believe in God, believe also in Me."

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 12.3; March 2005

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The Prayer of Jabez

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

"Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain.' And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, 'Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain.' So God granted him what he requested" (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Who was Jabez? There is no mention of him anywhere else in the scriptures. From the context, it does appear that he was of the tribe of Judah, and some think that he was a son of Koz (cf. v. 8). There are other theories as to who and what he was, but our purpose here is simply to see what lessons we can learn from this passage of scripture.

First, consider the attitude of Jabez. He was honorable. Why he was more honorable than his brothers we are not told, but it may have to do with the nature of his prayer. There are two characteristics that are needed for one to be honorable in prayer. One of them is being earnest, which means intense, zealous, sincere, and determined. We are told that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). The second of these characteristics is humility. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). The earnest, fervent prayer that is prayed in true humility is honorable before God.

Another aspect of the attitude of Jabez is that he directed his prayer to God. Because we are to worship the Lord our God and serve Him alone, Jesus taught us to address our prayers, saying, "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 4:10, 6:9). To direct such a prayer to God demonstrates that one is trusting in and thus dependent on Him for everything that is needed. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Second, consider the character of Jabez's petition. He requested a personal blessing. To ask God's blessing is to ask Him to bestow divine favor. There is nothing wrong with requesting God to bless us specifically. The Psalmist did. He prayed, "Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever" (Psalm 28:9). Jabez also asked God to enlarge his borders. This seems to relate to material prosperity. Thus, it is certainly scriptural for us to pray that God will bless us materially (note Matthew 6:11). However, the Bible offers no "quid pro quo" promise that if we do certain specified things for God then He will materially prosper us a certain specified amount, as some who hold the "Abundant Life--Health and Wealth" gospel teach. Rather, the Lord has simply said that if

we serve Him faithfully, He will provide for us (Matthew 6:33).

Then Jabez beseeched that God's hand would be with Him, no doubt to provide protection and guidance. Should we not pray with the Psalmist, "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:5)? Finally, Jabez expressed a petition that God would keep Him from evil. Jesus also indicated that His disciples should pray for God's preservation and deliverance, as He taught them to say, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). Of course, God's protection, guidance, preservation, and deliverance are all provided for us through the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The reason why Jabez thus prayed was so that He might not cause pain. One commentator expressed it this way: "Let me not experience the grief which my name implies, and which my sins would well produce." Another phrased it, "Grant that the grief implied in my name may not come upon me!" And likewise, it should be our prayer, "I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame!" (Psalm 119:31). Finally, consider the response of God, who granted Him what he requested. The Lord has promised us, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). God has said that He will hear and respond to the prayers of His people. Oh, He may not always give us what we ask for, when we ask for it, in exactly the way that we asked. But He is the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Therefore, we can trust Him to answer our prayers by providing what He knows best that we need in harmony with His will, just as He did with the prayer of Jabez.

By Wayne S. Walker
From Expository Files 8.11; November 2001

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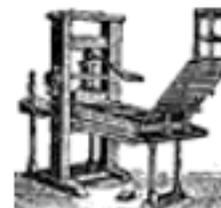


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Are You Helping The Son Build His Temple?

1 Chronicles 22

It was something that David had wanted to do so very much. But sometimes things just do not work out exactly the way we want them to. David had the spiritual strength to do his best for the Lord even when things did not go his way. It takes spiritual courage to accept disappointment and to remain committed to the Lord's cause. David was not perfect, but he was loyal to God. When he failed to be what he ought to be, he diligently searched for his way back to the Lord God of Israel.

The thing that David had especially wanted to do was to build the temple at Jerusalem. Before he died, he wanted to build a magnificent structure where Jehovah would be praised in accordance with the teachings of the Law. He had such vision for the structure!

But the Lord told David that it would be his son Solomon, and not David, who would build the temple. The reason? "You have shed much blood, and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth before Me." (1 Chronicles 22:8). Through no fault of his own but a simple matter of timing, David had been a man of war. There were enemies on every side during his reign which forced him to do battle to secure a homeland for God's people. It was not as a punishment that God forbade David to build the temple, but rather because of association. It was important that the temple not be associated with the brutality of war. It was to foreshadow a spiritual temple of peace and reconciliation; the church of Christ.

Preparation for the Son

"And David said, 'My son, Solomon, is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the Lord shall be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all lands. Therefore, I will make preparation for it.' Therefore, David made ample preparations before his death." (1 Chronicles 22:5).

David appointed workers and gathered materials (vss 1-4; 14-16). He wanted his son to be successful in this awesome task. But it would be Solomon who would be directly responsible for the building. As David promises, "Then you shall prosper, if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord commanded Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed." (1 Chronicles 22:13).

Though there are differences, of course, there are also many similarities between the building of the physical temple by David's son Solomon and the building of the spiritual temple by Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus said that "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" and "For I came down out of heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 4:34; 6:38). Jesus had been sent to this world on a mission. Even as David had encouraged his son to put the will of God first in his life, so Jesus put the will of the Father first in His life. He trusted the Father in everything. Like the son of David and the Son of God; so let the sons and daughters of God be today; let us put our trust in the Father's care; His plans and His providence as we put His will first in our lives.

The Son Given Control

"Now, my son, the Lord be with you that you may be successful, and build the house of the Lord your God, just as He has spoken concerning you. Only the Lord give you discretion and understanding and give you charge over Israel, so that you may keep the Law of the Lord your God." (1 Chronicles 22:11,12).

Solomon was placed in charge of the task of building the temple. Success depended upon the Lord being with him, and as always, discretion and understanding means having the wisdom to "keep the Law of the Lord your God." The wise and acceptable way to serve God is to apply His law to our lives and allow His word to be our authority. Solomon was a wise man, but not so "wise" that he took it upon himself to build the temple according to his plan and not God's.

Likewise, Jesus has built the spiritual temple, the church, according to God's eternal plan (Ephesians 3:10,11). In describing this spiritual temple the New Testament says that disciples "having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Jesus has promised to build His church and was granted authority to do so from the Father (Matthew 16:16-18; 28:18-20). As David commanded the builders in Israel to listen to his son, so also the Father commands us concerning His Son Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5b).

Building Materials for the Son to Use

"Of the gold, the silver and the bronze and the iron, there is no limit. Arise and work, and may the Lord be with you." (1 Chronicles 22:16).

In addition to the above mentioned materials, there was also large cut stones (verse 2) and large quantities of cedar logs (verse 3). Specific instructions regarding how the temple was to be assembled were given. After David's death, Solomon would begin the construction of the temple on Mount Moriah at Jerusalem. The account of this building process is given in 2 Chronicles 2-5 and the dedication of the temple is given in chapter 6.

Of course, the temple that Jesus built is not made with silver and gold, iron, stone and wood. The

Scriptures inform us that Christians are the "stones" out of which the spiritual temple of God is constructed. "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5). The church of God at Corinth was told, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The important point of this is to realize that it is the people of Christ that form God's spiritual temple today; people in whom God dwells by faith. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

Will You Help the Son Build the Temple?

"David also commanded all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon, saying, "...Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise, therefore, and build the sanctuary of the LORD." (1 Chronicles 22:17-19).

Of course those loyal to God, to David and Solomon, would lend their strength to the task at hand of building Jehovah's house. And, as history and the Scriptures record, build it they did. Though subsequently destroyed, a wall of the temple which had been underground survived and still stands today, now known as "The Wailing Wall".

And this brings us to our responsibility to the Father and the Son with reference to the spiritual temple. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of harvest to send out workers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37,38). Will you help the Lord gather His harvest? Will you help the Son build His house? "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18). Will you help the Son build His house? "Therefore those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." (Acts 8:4). Will you help the Son build His house? "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth..." (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Will you help the Son build His house? What will the Father say if you say "no"?

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.4; April 2006

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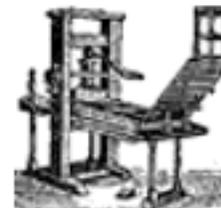


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"So Far as I Was Able"

1 Chronicles 29:1-21

"So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones and marble." (1 Chronicles 29:2)

As he came to the end of his reign over Israel, David made preparations for his son Solomon's reign of peace. David, the warrior king, had expanded the borders of the kingdom so his son could reign over a peaceful kingdom. Rather than build a kingdom, Solomon's purpose as king was intended to focus on construction of the temple of God, a project for which David had yearned. Though David was forbidden from building a house in which the ark of the covenant would rest, he spent years preparing, collecting, and providing for its construction. In the final chapter of First Chronicles, a testimony to David's preparation reveals to us several principles which we can apply as we offer to God gifts from our free will.

As the twenty-ninth chapter opens, David addresses the assembly of God's people, extolling the importance of the work before Solomon and all Israel in the building of the temple. Before asking the congregation to contribute to this noble effort, the aging king demonstrates his own commitment to this cause. From the treasury of Israel, "as far as he was able", David had provided for the house of God. Additionally, the righteous ruler had personally put his own wealth towards the construction of this glorious temple.

Answering the king's invitation to join with him in this work, the leaders among the people first contribute of their own free will. Heads of houses, tribes, and clans and commanders of the army of Israel all come together to graciously fund the house where God would one day place His name in Jerusalem. Then, following the example of their leaders, the people wholeheartedly unite to collect an astounding amount of riches.

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You." (1 Chronicles 29:14)

Impressed by the generosity of the congregation, David joyfully gives thanks to God, uttering a prayer which may challenge our thinking about our own giving. God is exalted as the owner of everything and

origin of all. Riches, blessing, honor, and strength all come from Him and are due Him. In essence, the man with the heart of God relates that those who give to God are simply conduits of God's possessions, transferring them from one hand into the other. Humbled by the realization of his own position before the Sovereign, David gratefully thanks God for the opportunity he and Israel had been given and asks the Almighty to forever keep such motives and purpose within the hearts of His people. Closing the prayer, the king commands the masses to praise Jehovah. And worship God they do -- offering from their joyful hearts even more in the form of sacrifices, libations, and burnt offerings.

Looking within this text regarding this period of preparation for the building of the temple, we can see several timeless principles which guided the giving of the Israelites and can guide our giving today as well...

First, giving which pleases God is both purposeful and intentional. The thoughtless tossing of a few coins or bills into a collection plate as it passes is unimaginable when considering the importance of serving God. David's example of giving was based on his devotion to the work which was to be done. The temple would honor God, and therefore David had intended to do all he could to provide for that purpose (29:2). Only after exhibiting such a prioritized practice before the people did David call upon the masses to match his devotion. Yet even in his charge to contribute to the construction of the temple, David did not call for cash, but appealed to the people to consecrate themselves to God (29:5). Similarly, excellent examples of purposeful giving in the New Testament Scriptures are the matchless Macedonians who were able to generously give because they had first given themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). Before we consider how much we should give to God, we must consider if we've first given ourselves to God. Once we are God's possession, we should not give thoughtlessly or from our "leftovers", but our contribution must be considered and purposed in our hearts (2 Cor. 9:7).

Another principle of giving found within this account is that gifts to God are to be consecrated, set apart for God and His purposes. Not only were the people consecrated (29:5), but the collection was to be put into a treasury to be used only for the construction of the temple (29:8). Even today, the Lord's people contribute to a common collection which is to be used only for those purposes which God has ordained (1 Cor. 16:1-3). Care for destitute saints (1 Cor. 16:1), and other works of benevolence, evangelism, worship and edification of the saints -- those works with which God has charged the church -- are the only appropriate uses for these consecrated funds (1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:9-10, 17; Heb. 10:24-25). Certainly we would not misappropriate monies from this treasury by using them for more common means which merely suit our own tastes and interests in the worldly arenas of entertainment, recreation, or secular education.

A third principle which defines the giving which glorifies God is that each one's gift is of his own volition. From David to the leaders to the common man, each individual chose to give towards the Lord's house on his own. The text stresses the willingness of the people to contribute to this noble purpose (29:6, 9). No less does God expect, nor will He accept, from those who would serve Him today (2 Cor. 9:7). Our gifts must come from our wholehearted, joyful devotion to our Heavenly Father. Just as the Israelites rejoiced in their contribution and subsequent overflow of offerings (29:9, 20-21), we should count it a privilege to take from His one hand and give it into the other (29:16). What a joy it is to be counted as worthy stewards of the Creator (29:14)!

Finally, within this passage -- and throughout the Scriptures -- it is evident that God is glorified in generosity of giving (29:14, 16). How we view God will be evident in many aspects of our lives, not the least of which is our giving. Do we believe that He provides for us? Then our giving will not be lessened because of anxieties over our needs (2 Cor. 9:8-9). Do we consider Him as our highest priority (Matt. 6:33)? Then our giving will reflect it.

This final chapter in the Chronicles' account of David's reign should inspire us to emulate the heart of this humble servant of God in our giving so that each of us may also say that we have given "so far as I was able".

By Stuart Tullis
From Expository Files 12.12; December 2005

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

David Praises the Lord

1 Chronicles 29:10-13

"David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly ..." What does this mean? What is this about? This is about David speaking well of God; David is expressing adoration and respect to God. But this is more than just a speech or something said repeatedly and ritualistically. No, this is about being so impressed by the character of God, so influenced by His marvelous attributes, we have to say something; we are compelled by the sheer power and majesty of the Lord to bless Him, or praise His name. We cannot contain our adoration for Him! His Word has reached our hearts and had the intended influence.

Today, how do Christians do this? How do we bless, or praise God? Let me suggest four ways we praise God:

1. WE PRAISE GOD IN SONG.

"And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." (Romans 15:11, NIV).

Singing isn't just about music; vocal music, in this case, is just the medium. Fundamentally we are expressing our praise to God; we are thinking about God, and the things of God; we are honoring the Savior. We are edifying one another, and reminding ourselves of the promises of the gospel. We praise God in song. Mechanical instruments are not suited to this. They cannot think, honor or edify one another.

2. WE PRAISE GOD IN PRAYER

when we follow Jesus instruction, and express our adoration for Him -- "Hallowed be Thy Name," (Matt. 6:9).

Study the prayers of the Bible. Find, read and study the passages in the Bible where men and women prayed. You'll find great expressions of reverence and honor for God. We praise God in prayer.

3. WE PRAISE GOD IN OBEDIENCE,

for in disobedience, we fail to glorify Him (Rom. 3:23).

When I read something in God's Word, I'm convinced God is right and I have the faith and courage to act on that, I'm praising God - by the obedient attention I'm giving His Word. In the modern religious world there are flattering words expressed to the Father and Son, and much talk of praising God but little

obedience to give that sentiment meaning. I am not really praising God until I decide to follow all His instructions. Jesus said, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do the things which I say?" (Lk. 6:46).

4. WE PRAISE GOD THROUGH THE INFLUENCE OF FAITHFUL LIVES

"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16, NIV).

As I follow the instructions of God and honor the Son, there flows from my life just exactly the kind of influence that will do people good and not evil. Through godly behavior, we light the way for others.

David begins this stirring and prayerful statement by praising the name of God; in another place he wrote: "According to Your Name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth," (Psa. 48:10). The next thing David said is, an acknowledgment of the

ETERNITY OF GOD.

"David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting." Only with great difficulty are we able to try and wrap our minds around this concept of ETERNITY. We are so time-oriented - we are so many years old; we have 24 hours a day; we do things at certain times... We are creatures of time - so only with great difficulty, are we able to think of eternity.

But to the extent we are able to entertain the concept - God is eternal; He is "from everlasting to everlasting." His existence is timeless; He had no beginning, He anticipates no end. We are creatures of time here on earth - He is timeless, "from everlasting to everlasting." Deity entered into a timed existence, in the person of Christ, but deity exists outside the flow of time - God is "from everlasting, to everlasting." Next . . .

DAVID ASCRIBES TO THE FATHER THE FOLLOWING:

Greatness.

Everything we know about God should cause us to regard and adore His greatness. His greatness should cause us to believe and confess what is written in Psalms 104:1 - "Praise the Lord, o my soul, O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty." Likewise, Psalms 117:2 - "For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord." Every time I worship God I need to be mindful of His greatness. When I pray, study His Word preach His Word, I ought to reflect on His greatness. And certainly in all my behavior, I should bear in mind how Great my Father is.

Power.

John heard the great roar of the multitude in heaven; they were shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God," (Rev. 10:1). We through the gospel have access to God's Power -- when faith prompts us to obey Christ in baptism, THE POWER OF GOD LIFTS US FROM SIN. Colossians 2:12 says -- "...having been buried with him in baptism, and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." And - God "did not give us a spirit of

timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self discipline," (2 Tim. 1:7). Power belongs to God.

Glory.

God is characterized by GLORY, and that means everything about God signifies the highest esteem and honor -- He exhibits or exudes that which causes men to praise Him. In two Old Testament books - perhaps more than most of the others - we are told, over and over, about the glory of God: Isaiah and Psalms.

In Isaiah we discover statements like this: "The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously. (Isaiah 24:23, NIV). "And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 40:5, NIV).

In Psalms, statements like this: The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. (Psalms 113:4, NIV). Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. (Psalms 115:1, NIV). Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. (Psalms 105:3, NIV).

In the New Testament some statements made by Paul help us take in this concept, of God's glory. When Paul describes what sin is, he says - when we sin, we fall short of the glory of God; one translation says, we fail to glorify God --- Rom. 3:23, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This would suggest, if we will keep clear in our hearts the real glory of God, that will contribute to righteousness; it will help keep us from sin. In Romans one Paul is explaining how sin had developed and flourished in the human race - in particular, the Gentiles. As he speaks of the futility and darkness and ignorance of idolatry he says they exchanged the glory of God for images made to look like man and animals (Rom. 1:23). They "...exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." So, it is exceedingly important to follow David's lead - and ascribe praise to God for His glory.

Victory.

In the Mosaic dispensation and during the United Kingdom period, any good victory achieved by the Army of Israel was attributed to God. So you find statements - all through the Old Testament - like this in 2 Sam. 8:6, "... the Lord gave David victory wherever he went." The victory they enjoyed - was victory God granted to them. This is Deut. 20:4 .. "For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory." Faithful children of Israel would sing about this - - "Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things!'" (Psa. 118:15).

Majesty.

The book of Hebrews begins with an eloquent, beautiful statement about GOD SPEAKING THROUGH THIS SON (Heb. 1:1-4). Simon Peter was privileged to see Jesus transfigured and he later wrote about it with these words: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty," (2 Pet. 1:16). These are attributes of God; things that belong to Him: Greatness, Power, Glory, Victory, Majesty ... then - a

statement about God's ...

Ownership.

"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours." The thrust of David's words are - God is worthy of our praise, our worship and obedience ... and He is worthy of praise due to His greatness; His power, glory, victory and majesty.

Reflecting on David's praise of God, let me say: no matter how closely we try to walk with the Lord, we cannot escape the impact of a disappointing and evil world ... THINGS HAPPEN THAT WE TAKE NO PLEASURE IN. There is a certain pain about life here on the earth and all the unpleasant things we encounter. God can help us meet all these struggles, if we will let Him influence us. And one way we let that influence work is to praise Him and worship Him and honor Him, because of who He is and what He is about. He is worthy of praise due to His greatness; His power, glory, victory and majesty. And next ... let's think about ...

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

Sovereignty. That means complete independence in the exercise of rule or authority. Some exercise authority in some way - but they do not exercise authority independently. The civil servant, for example, does not enjoy independence. In the Bible, there is such a thing as parental authority, but that authority is a function of God's order for the home. They have authority, but not sovereignty!

When we speak of God - His rule, His authority and supremacy, HE ENJOYS AND EXERCISES AUTHORITY INDEPENDENT OF ANYBODY ELSE !! God has complete independence in the exercise of His authority. That means He doesn't have to clear anything with anybody! It means He is the Judge of all the earth, and what He decides is - by definition - RIGHTEOUS, and TRUE and GOOD and FAIR. His law may not seem good or fair to men - - but God is God; He is the Judge of all the earth; His name shall endure forever, and this is about SOVEREIGNTY!

Romans 11:33-36 is such an excellent statement of God's sovereignty. For eleven chapters Paul has been giving his comprehensive account of the gospel. Step by step he has shown how God has devised and revealed a way of putting sinners right with himself; how Christ died for our sins, and was raised for our justification; how we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection; how the Christian life is lived by walking in the Spirit not the flesh. We are educated, in the first eleven chapters of the Roman letter; there we find analysis and argument and affirmation. BUT NOW - at the end of all this analysis and argument and affirmation -- THERE IS ADORATION! Eventually, analysis and argument must give way to adoration ...

This is like a mountain climber. You work and sweat and put forth effort; then when you get to the summit, you enjoy the view; you adore this new perspective. Likewise - in our study of the Bible, we are called upon to really exert ourselves; there is debate and analysis and argument. But eventually - analysis and argument must give way to adoration. Paul - in the first eleven chapters - takes up the subjects of justification, sanctification, glorification and NOW, it's like he stops ... out of breath ... TO ADORE THE GLORY OF GOD, and to speak of His sovereignty. He celebrates the profound riches of

the wisdom and knowledge of God.

He raises a rhetorical question, Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor ... Who has ever given to God, that God should repay Him? Notice - he gives the reason for our dependence on God - for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. Then the final ascription: TO HIM BE THE GLORY FOR EVER! Amen. This is Paul's outburst of praise, informed by revelation - and inspired by the sovereignty of God.

And, it is very much like David's statement in our text --- "David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all."

Conclusion:

David brought his reign to a close talking to God, and talking to His people about God. These were his thoughts, not only at the end of his life but throughout his life. When David was in trouble, suffering and running from enemies he had these thoughts of God. When David was confronted by Nathan about his sin and as repentance worked inside of David and bore fruit, he had these thoughts of God. When he - by inspiration - wrote the Psalms; and when he made mention of the coming Messiah he had these thoughts of God.

I hope we too will have these thoughts about God; and through continued reading, study, prayer and practice -- I trust we will be drawn closer and closer to Him, worshipping Him and obeying Him from the heart.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 5.12; December 1998

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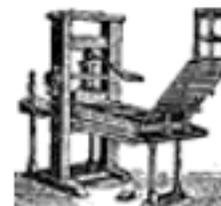


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The Battle is Not Yours, But God's

2 Chronicles 20:1-29

Sometimes, if we are to succeed and win victory, the Lord has to be the One to fight the battle. This is the way it must be to win the victory over sins. Only through what God has done can we win the victory. We cannot redeem ourselves from our sins. We have no price we can offer. That battle must be the Lord's! There are many examples of this principle throughout the pages of Scripture.

Jumpin' Jehoshaphat

"So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD before the new court, and he said, 'O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.'" (2 Chronicles 20:4-6).

An alliance of Moab, Ammon and others had invaded Judah. It was a matter of mathematics; the enemy by far outnumbered the people of Judah. There seemed to be only one possible outcome; the defeat of Judah.

Jumping up, Jehoshaphat stood in the temple and prayed. There was only one place to turn. Sometimes life is like that. And with reference to death, and eternity, God is the only One who can make a difference!

The Lord responded through His prophet, Jahaziel. **"...and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, "Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's."** (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Yes, here was a case where the battle had to be the Lord's, or it would be lost. However, that the battle was the Lord's did not mean that the people of Judah were to sit and do nothing. They were instructed: "You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the

LORD is with you." (2 Chronicles 20:17). They went out and faced their enemy, and the Lord gave them victory as they watched their enemy's alliance fall apart and the former allies attack one another.

The Lord's Strong Arm

"Get yourself up on a high mountain,
O Zion, bearer of good news,
Lift up your voice mightily,
O Jerusalem, bearer of good news;
Lift it up, do not fear.
Say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.
Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes."
(Isaiah 40:9-11)

This is what is known as a Messianic prophecy because it speaks of events having to do with the coming of the Messiah, all of which were fulfilled during the incarnation of the Word of God; Jesus of Nazareth, some seven centuries later. One cannot help but think of Jesus as these verses are read. Isaiah is talking about "good news" and in fact the word "gospel" as in "the gospel of Jesus Christ" means "good news".

Also, to be announced to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" We are again reminded of Thomas' statement of belief made to Jesus following the resurrection, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28; cf. John 1:1-3;14).

And who can miss the figure of the Shepherd? Indeed, Jesus is the "good shepherd" who "lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Previously in the text, Isaiah had also predicted the work of John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the Lord doing his preaching in the wilderness area of the Jordan valley; "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3).

But note especially the appeal to depend on the might of the Lord and His ruling arm (Isaiah 40:10). Our salvation is by what the Lord's might has brought to us through the sacrifice of the "Good Shepherd"! Like Jehoshaphat of old, as we face the overwhelming temporal and eternal consequences of sin, we have no where to turn but to the Lord. Note the optimistic conclusion of trusting in the Lord's power:

"Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired.
His understanding is inscrutable.
He gives strength to the weary,
And to him who lacks might He increases power.
Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.
(Isaiah 40:28-31)

When We Fully Place Our Confidence in God

Can a God with that kind of power make a difference in my life? Consider that His power is directed by His love, and what His love motivated Him to give for us (John 3:16). Understand and comprehend that He is a God with whom all things are possible (Matthew 19:25-26). Recognize that He is a God who is able to know our needs even beyond what we know ourselves! (Ephesians 3:14-21) He is not limited by our lack of imagination, creativity, vision or power as we are.

Do you recall the ancient nation of Israel, after witnessing God's power in many ways; the ten plagues on their Egyptian masters, their deliverance at the Red Sea; water from the rocks of the wilderness and food from the sky; how that nation still, tragically, lacked confidence in God's power as they stood on the brink of the promised land of Canaan (Numbers 13-14)? God was able, but they were unwilling to believe. God would have given them whatever they needed to win the victory, if only they had believed.

That was then, now is now. We find ourselves in a very similar circumstance, and that is not by accident. The Lord caused the account of Israel's failure of faith to be recorded and preserved so that we might learn not to do likewise; "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (1 Corinthians 10:11). God would have blessed them with whatever strength they would need. He will us as well. We are yet in the wilderness, and God will bring us home if we have the trust and humility to submit to Him (1 Peter 5:6-7).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.7; July 2006

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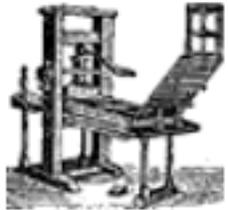
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Doing Right, But Not With a Whole Heart

2 Chronicles 25:2

Amaziah was king of Judah, and was said to have done "what was right in the sight of the Lord..." But, unfortunately, that is not all that was said about him. There was a problem worth mentioning because it is a very common problem today as it was then. "And he did right in the sight of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart." (2 Chronicles 25:2). Other translations have not with a "loyal heart" or "perfect heart" or "blameless heart" or "wholeheartedly". (The word "whole" here translates the Hebrew word shalem which means finished, complete, whole.

We must not settle for Amaziah's attitude toward God! Many think it is enough. It is not. In contrast to Amaziah, who had less than a wholehearted commitment to God's will, we can consider such ones as Joshua and Caleb. "None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully." (Numbers 32:11,12). See the contrast? Amaziah followed the Lord, but not with a whole heart, but Joshua and Caleb followed the Lord fully.

Jesus said those who were pure in heart are blessed because they will see God. This is a part of what it means to be "pure in heart" (Mt. 5:8): to be single-minded in our devotion to God and in our determination to do His will, to "love one thing." When we purify our hearts we put God and His will first like Joshua and Caleb. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).

King Saul's Mistake

The Amalekites were an evil and corrupt society living in the Land of Canaan. They posed all kinds of threats to Israel; moral, spiritual and physical. God ordained that the nation be destroyed, and appointed King Saul to do the job. When God instructed Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites, Saul chose to do most of what he was commanded. But Saul set aside a very small part of God's commandment. Later, he would explain he did so only with the best and noblest of intentions. He suggested that his way would actually be an improvement over what God had commanded.

I would hope all can see that is wrong headed thinking.

Saul spared the king and some of the sheep. To do this thing was just a small matter in Saul's eyes, but it was evil rebellion and pride in God's eyes. People often look at "minor" disobedience differently than God does. We assume that thinking "it is no big deal" will mean that God will think that as well. Saul seemed surprised at God's anger. We note this so that one day we will not also face God's anger with surprise because we, too, looked at a commandment or two of His as "no big deal". Instead of developing "reasonable" explanations as to why our way is best, it is better to simply obey the Lord. (See Saul's reasoning in 1 Samuel 15:7-9,13-23).

Becoming Guilty of All

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." (James 2:10,11).

We need to be clear on what this passage teaches, and what it does not teach. The passage does not teach that no matter how devoted one is to the Lord - no matter how diligently one strives to obey the Lord - one inadvertent transgression makes one as unrighteous in God's eyes as the worst sinner. (i.e. That if you get angry and say something you should not have said, then God will consider you an adulterer, liar, murderer, thief as well).

A clear distinction is made in the New Testament between those who are honestly trying to serve God and make mistakes and those who are not trying - (1 John 1:6-10). But the point is that God has given us His whole will and it is not up to us to choose to disregard any part of it. None of us are above God's commandments. We are not judges of the law of God but will be judged by the law. We are told to So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. (James 2:12; see also 4:11).

Some think that obedience in most things will compensate for disregard in a few - but no amount of "good works" will compensate for a lawless attitude - (Matthew 7:21-23). We must respect the commandments of God fully and completely. This means I must put aside my preference, my opinion, my convenience, my desire and say "yes" to the Lord's will fully and completely. If and when this loyalty to the Lord puts me at odds with popular opinion, then I must choose the commandments of the Lord. If we set aside God's will when it conflicts with our own, then we are not "obeying" God even when we do what He has said, because we are only doing that we already want to do. It is as if we are saying, "Lord, I'll do whatever you command as long as I agree with it." That is not enough! We will be "transgressors of the law" (James 2:11).

Some Practical Applications

The proper application of this lesson would be to search the word of God and apply it to our lives (James 1:22-25). It would be for each disciple to become a diligent, active participator in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). It would be to worship the Lord full heartedly in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). It would be to daily pattern all of our words and actions by the word of Christ (Colossians 3:16).

Those who truly and completely devote themselves to the gospel of Christ aim to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). God is God and the Originator of all His will. We simply cannot disregard any of it without disregarding God Himself! We need to be like Joshua and Caleb; to follow the Lord with the whole heart, and receive the blessings of God.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.6; June 2006

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Qualities Of Noble Male Leadership

2 Chronicles 32

1After these deeds of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered Judah; he encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them over to himself. 2And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem, 3he consulted with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city; and they helped him. 4Thus many people gathered together who stopped all the springs and the brook that ran through the land, saying, “Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?” 5And he strengthened himself, built up all the wall that was broken, raised it up to the towers, and built another wall outside; also he repaired the Millo in the City of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance. 6Then he set military captains over the people, gathered them together to him in the open square of the city gate, and gave them encouragement, saying, 7“Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. 8With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (2 Chron. 32:1-8)

Observe in this passage several qualities of noble male leadership. These are exemplified by Hezekiah’s response to the threat of Sennacherib. The Assyrian invaded Judah, hoping to conquer key cities. When this threat came to the attention of Hezekiah he took prudent actions immediately.

We learn that threats should be “...met with courage, energy, intelligence, and piety. These qualities Hezekiah was now showing. He had given way to trepidation, and he had resorted to means which were unworthy of his position and his piety (see 2 Kings 18:9-16). But now he was in a nobler mood. His courage rose to the occasion (ver. 7); his energy was manifested in the effective measures (vers. 4, 5) he took to distress and to disappoint the enemy; his intelligence was shown in his taking counsel with the strongest and wisest of his people, in the rapidity of the measures he adopted and in their sagacity, and also in his effort to inspire the people with confidence and security; his piety shone forth in his address to the people, calling on them to remember that they had not an ‘arm of flesh,’ but ‘the Lord their God,’ to lean upon. Let us meet any form of trouble — disappointment, loss, bereavement, sickness, or any affliction whatsoever — in this spirit and with these qualities, and it will not master us; we shall prevail over it. It will not leave desolation and ruin in its track; it will rather leave benefit and blessing behind it.” (Clarkson, Pulpit Commentary) These comments are helpful and true. But our focus now is directed to the noble qualities of male leadership.

At this time in Hezekiah’s reign as king, his leadership was marked by mature watchfulness. Verse 2

says that king Hezekiah “saw” what Sennacherib was doing; it came to his attention. National defense requires that leaders be vigilant. It is necessary to watch for the approach of any threat to the people. At Ft. Meade, Maryland there is a park called “National Vigilance Park.” It is dedicated to honor the pilots in various wars who flew missions of aerial reconnaissance. These men and their leaders were watching; alert to threats and the approach of the enemy. Hezekiah was that kind of leader. He saw the approaching threat and was alert to the danger; ready to respond because of duty to God and man.

Then, the Bible says He consulted with his officials (vss. 1-3). Good leaders confer and consult, asking for a good plan from qualified people; listening to people of wisdom. There can be great value in listening to people who know and who care. One quality of noble leadership is to listen and learn from others. Hezekiah saw the enemy threat and consulted with his officials.

Then He went to work. Verse 5 says, “he worked hard.” Water supplies accessible to the Assyrians were blocked off. Walls were repaired and fortifications made stronger. Bulwarks were urgently erected. Weapons and shields were manufactured. Defensive preparations were undertaken by the authority and under the orders of the vigilant king. We should know, even when we see the threat of the enemy; even when we consult with those who are qualified to help and we form a plan, the plan doesn’t work itself. The plan must be activated by people. The work must be done.

Likewise, in the components of noble leadership, we observe in Hezekiah – delegation. Verse 6 says that “he appointed” men to do certain things. Good leaders realize, they cannot do everything alone. There must be the participation of others; a team effort. Good leaders use the process of delegation. Not only do they consult with others, they assign duties to qualified people. Certainly not every task can be delegated. Mature leaders must carefully consider what can and what cannot be delegated. Care must be taken to delegate duty to people who are qualified. Higher efficiency, productivity and success is often directly related to skills of delegation. Woodrow Wilson once said: "I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow."

Hezekiah encouraging his people. In any nation, any organization, any family, any church, morale/ attitude is critical! There needs to be an environment of hope. It is good for people to hear their leaders say: “This is right; this is good!” “With us is the Lord our God.” “Let us press on, with love for God and love for each other.” Think of leaders as encouragers in that which is good, right and valuable. Hezekiah filled that role. He was watchful; consulted with qualified people; labored (active faith); delegated wisely and encouraged the people. These are the defining characteristics of noble leadership. One more thing . . .

A defining component of Godly Leadership is (in verse 20): Prayer. “King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer...” All leadership; all work; all efforts – must be submitted to God, for His care and guidance (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6).

Take these qualities of noble male leadership, and move into the practical applications! Think of national leaders, spiritual leader and family leaders.

National Leaders should find in this biblical example a model for noble leadership. Governing

authorities should watch for all approaching threats. They should consult with those who are wise and skilled. Our leaders should labor to activate a good plan. Civil servants need to appoint or delegate duties to qualified people (not just those to whom favors are owed). And never overlook the value of encouraging the citizens to be faithful, to do what is right, to act in the interests and good of all. Leaders should lead to generate and encourage these components of good morale.

Spiritual leaders - in the New Testament, elders. It both necessary and good for congregations to be led by men who are devoted to these defining characteristics of noble male leadership. Elders must be watchful – aware of threats against the flock (Acts 20:27-32). Elders should be willing to consult; to take into account or consider the wishes and wisdom of those in the flock with ability and goodwill. Elders must be workers; laborers in the vineyard who can delegate various aspects of work to people who are qualified. And spiritual leaders need to encourage the flock in that which is good and right. These are the defining characteristics of good & noble leadership. Our prayers and efforts should be directed to our young men who can become elders some day. {Observe in the text, the unity of the people under good leadership: “they helped him ... many people gathered ... the people were strengthened.”}

Fathers, Husbands!

If you are a husband and/or a father – God expects you to be a spiritual leader in your family. In Eph. 6:4, Fathers are addressed and assigned the work of “the training and admonition of the Lord” in the responsibility they have to their children. In Eph. 5:23, “the husband is the head of the wife.” God expects husbands and fathers to be spiritual leaders.

This is more than just financial support. This includes but is not limited to physical provision of shelter, food and clothing. We are here placing stress on Spiritual Leadership!

We must get back to thinking of husbands and fathers as spiritual leaders in the home! Read the Bible to your family, and led them in prayer. Be certain your children attend their Bible classes, and do whatever reading and assignments they are given. Encourage the whole family in the direction of full participation in the work of the church. And don't allow sports, entertainment and secular activities to rob your children of that participation!

The time is past and remains urgent today to emphasize this; to re-establish heads of households as the spiritual leaders in the home. Fathers and Husbands, consider the model of efficient leadership exemplified by Hezekiah.

1. **WATCHFULNESS.** This simply means looking, monitoring – aware of the influences, threats and weaknesses in your family. Pay attention daddy!
2. **CONSULTATION:** getting help you may need, from wise and qualified people to address the threats you must respond to.
3. **LABOR** is the matter of working hard for the spiritual success of your home; for a godly marriage and for children who become faithful to the Lord.

4. DELEGATION involves assigning various duties to family members, fairly and in keeping with the goal of godliness and purity.

5. ENCOURAGEMENT. The apostle Paul was very careful to say this to fathers: "...do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged," (Col. 3:21). This directs fathers to sincerely engage in the opposite of discouragement. This prohibits discouragement and places the duty on fathers to impart and inspire encouragement. Praise your children in what is right; convey to them your love and care for them; explain your concerns about their spiritual future. Talk to them about God, about obeying the gospel; read and pray with them. Encourage them from the early ages, to be morally discerning people of godly character. It will not just happen!

And may I add, the first step in leadership in the home is to be led by the Lord yourself! You cannot be ungodly and lead in a godly manner. You cannot do things that are wrong and effectively lead people in what is right.

One of the pressing needs of our time in the home, the church and the nation is noble male leadership! Women cannot do it all. Women have their assignment from God and great power and influence comes to pass, when godly women accept the challenges and duties, which in some cases – men have neglected and shunned! But let us never give up calling upon men to be accountable; to learn noble leadership from Bible examples, like this one in 2 Chron. 32.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles. And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said."

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 10.9, September, 2003

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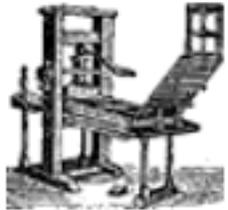
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A Prepared Heart

Ezra 7:10

The Scriptures say, “[And Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.](#)” (Ezra 7:10). This verse is actually a summary of Ezra’s life and purpose. He was determined to fully accept the Lord’s direction in life. This desire came from deep conviction and reverence for God. This led Ezra to seek out the Lord’s will in His revealed Word, the Scriptures.

Some complain that the Lord’s will is too difficult to understand. But others, like Ezra, have had no problem in understanding it. There is a whole list of just plain, regular folks in Rom. 16 who all understood it quite well. Timothy is said to have understood it from a child.

The fact is, Jesus said that some would never understand. But it was not because of a lack of ability but rather a lack of will. They have unprepared hearts. To understand, Jesus insisted that one must desire to have God in his or her life. He or she must be willing to open eyes, ears and heart.

The parable of the sower sowing seed is a case in point, well illustrating how important it is for us to prepare our hearts to understand and receive the words of Christ (Matt. 13:3-9; 18-23). One who is unwilling will often complain it is just too difficult to understand, but Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15).

In dealing with a rebellious people, the Lord chose Isaiah to be His prophet. Through Isaiah, Jehovah charged, “I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear.” (Isa. 65:12). These people had turned their backs on God, and the more alienated they became the more their nation’s problems grew until finally their nation fell.

They did not answer God’s call. It is important for us to understand that God still calls today; not through prophets like Isaiah but through the gospel of Jesus Christ, His Son. The Scriptures affirm that God “called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess. 2:14). Answering this call means bringing our lives into harmony with the teachings of the gospel; to “walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. 2:12).

We do not know what the future holds for our own nation today. We can continue to ignore God’s call and slide into tragic defeat just the way Isaiah’s people did long ago. Or, we can remember our

foundation and reclaim it. Though none of us as individuals can decide for our nation, we each can decide for ourselves to answer the call of God. Prepare your heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to share with others the Lord's statutes and judgments.

By Jon W. Quinn

The Final Page

From Expository Files 13.3; March 2006

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How Nehemiah Prayed

Nehemiah 1:5-11

Nehemiah was serving as cupbearer of King Artaxerxes in Persia when he received sad news. His fellow Jews who had gone back to Judah were suffering terribly in the ruins of Jerusalem. When he learned of the sad state of his brethren, Nehemiah mourned, fasted and prayed. Read his prayer, recorded for us in Nehemiah 1:5-11, and observe these important features:

He recognized the exalted position of God (1:5). Nehemiah was approaching the Lord who is the "Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God."

He recognized the humbled position of Man (1:6-7). Unlike arrogant men today who act as if they have the right to give orders to God, Nehemiah entered the presence of God with great humility. He confessed his own sins and the sins of his people. He did not, and could not, make demands. He was a helpless and humble supplicant, who recognized the enormous distance between the perfect God and sinful men.

He based his petition in the absolute faithfulness of God (1:8-10). Nehemiah did not try to convince God to change, because God is already perfect and just. He fulfills his promises. The suffering of the people was not a failing of God, but the result of their own sin. This same faithfulness was the basis for Nehemiah's hope. As surely as God had fulfilled promises to punish, he would fulfill his promises to rescue his chosen people.

He asked in faith (1:11). Finally, Nehemiah made his request. He asked that God open a door for him to help his brethren. He was preparing to ask the king to let him return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah placed his confidence in the Lord who is powerful to bless the plans of those who truly dedicate themselves to him.

We need to pray with the same humility and faith that Nehemiah displayed. We have no right to make demands of God, but those who serve him obediently enjoy the privilege of humbly talking to the God of heaven in prayer.

By Dennis Allan
From Expository Files 5.1; January 1998

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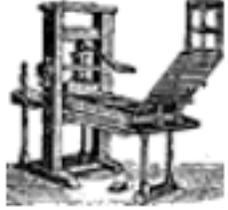
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Continuing The Lord's Work In The Face Of Fear

Nehemiah 4

Nehemiah is an exciting and inspiring book about this man, Nehemiah, and the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was a contemporary of Ezra and a cupbearer to the king in the Persian palace. He led the third and last return of Jewish captives back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. His faith in God and his love for his people is impressive -- and this, in spite of hardship and opposition. Opposition from outside and discouragement from inside, yet the task of rebuilding was complete in only fifty-two days.

There are some great lessons for us to learn from chapter four, beginning in the first three verses:

[Neh. 4:1-3](#)

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble--burned as they are?" Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"

Here is this man, Sanballat, who heard about this band of Jews rebuilding the walls and he was angry. He ridiculed the Jews. He spoke to his associates and the army of Samaria, no doubt with a tone of ridicule and sarcasm: "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble...?"

One of Sanballat's associates was this Ammonite, Tobiah. And he agreed: "What they are building - if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones."

Let's learn this: It should never surprise us when we do the Lord's work and some react with anger and ridicule. Jesus - in the sermon on the Mount - said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," (Matt. 5:10). He said to His disciples: "...if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Paul said, all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Throughout the Bible history of God's people they were opposed. We ought not to think it will be

different today. It may be subtle or it may take the form of open ridicule. Former friends may sever all ties with us when we become the Lord's disciple. There may be social humiliations and a variety of difficulties and pressures when we are openly faithful to God. We can be sure, the more active our faith, the deeper our courage and the bolder our preaching - there will be opposition. The likes of Sanballat and Tobiah are still here on the earth -- and Satan will use them to provoke us and discourage us.

How did Nehemiah respond to this threat? He prayed, and that is the next lesson to learn from this section.

[Neh. 4:4,5](#)

Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

In the Old Testament - especially in the book of Psalms - there are prayers like this which may seem strange to us. We are familiar with the teachings of Christ who said love your enemies and pray for them... not against them (Matt. 5:44-48). Jesus and Stephen exemplify this - by requesting forgiveness for those who killed them (Lk. 23:34 & Acts 7:60).

But in the Old Testament there are these imprecatory prayers, where people of God called upon God to defeat and punish the enemy (Psalms 59 & Psalms 137). Yet in these prayers - of David and Nehemiah - I see no evidence of personal vengeance; but rather - appeals on behalf of righteousness and petitions for the vindication of God's justice.

BUT HERE'S WHAT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO OBSERVE - When Nehemiah became aware of this growing opposition; in the face of this fear he prayed. This is what we need to learn, and this is what we need to do - when we face fear; when we become aware of opposition: **PRAY!**

One good example of this is found in Acts chapter four. Acts 4 opens with the report of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem "greatly disturbed" when they heard the apostles preaching "in Jesus, the resurrection from the dead." Peter and John were taken into custody; Peter gave a bold defense of their work, and verse 13 says: "...when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." A man who had been healed was standing nearby -- evidence of their work. The unbelievers who had taken Peter and John conferred privately and decided to severely threaten them and tell them not to preach the gospel. Peter and John were released after this punishment -- and here's what Luke tells us, beginning with verse 23 of Acts 4.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you

anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

What should we learn from these examples, of Nehemiah, and these disciples in Acts 4? We learn that regardless of the opposition, even when we are threatened and punished and told not to preach, we get on our knees and pray, then we get right back in the pulpit. We take note of the opposition, talk to God about it -- but we never stop doing what's right.

Now here's where we are: As the people do the Lord's work there is this angry opposition. Nehemiah responds by praying. But notice in verse 6... they didn't stop working!

[Neh. 4:6](#)

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

The temptation is - to become so worried; so terrified by the opposition - that you pray and pray and wring your hands and wait, **AND STOP WORKING!** This happens to local churches and can become the death of a local church. You experience a few set-backs. The number dwindles, the budget is strained, and people think about the negatives, talk about the grim prospects -- and talk themselves into death, **BY CEASING THE WORK OF THE LORD.** (Cut-backs in numbers and budgets do not demand cut-backs in obedience or work!)

These people had a "mind to work," in spite of the fear, the opposition and the hard work. Verse 6 says they continued the work and made progress "and the entire wall was joined together up to half!" Let me say, long before Sanballat and Tobiah mounted their campaign of fear, these people had decided to work!

And that's what Christians need to do! When you become a Christian you decide to follow the Lord, do His work, cooperate with others in His work - **AND YOU JUST KEEP DOING THAT** regardless of how much money you don't have; regardless of how many people and regardless of any opposition. You do the Lord's work because you love Him... not because all the circumstances are favorable! We need the attitude of these good people - which is called "a mind to work."

And one reason this is important is - the opposition may get worse!

[Neh. 4:7,8](#)

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

The enemies hear of the progress these Jews are making and they decide to "turn up the heat." In spite of their ridicule the wall was being repaired. The gaps were being closed. They were very angry. They plotted together to fight and stir up trouble and this may happen to us. If we become discouraged -- the

devil knows that. Our discouragement will become the devil's opportunity and he will dispatch his ministers to trouble us.

So, we've got to keep our heart focused and our heads up. As soon as we invite everybody to a pity party and start crying around about how hard it is and how bad things are, the devil sees our weakness and takes advantage of us. There was always be opposition to what is good and right and it starts when you obey the gospel.

I heard of an old preacher who would give a little speech to every person he baptized -- after the baptism, and in front of the audience -- he would admonish and warn and encourage the new child of God. And among other things he would say something like this: As soon as the devil finds out you've become a Christian, the armies of hell will be called out against you!

Sanballat, Tobiah, The Arabs and Ammonites; those kind of people are alive today doing the bidding of their father, the devil. As the opposition builds we must continue praying and watching.

[Neh. 4:9](#)

But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Two things here: prayer and watching. Watching without prayer is futile; praying without watching is disobedience and foolish. And this is exactly what the New Testament teaches.

Matt. 26:41

"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Mark 13:33

"Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

Luke 21:36

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

So here's what happened: As the Jews under Nehemiah engaged in this good work there was opposition; the opposition grew. Nehemiah prayed; the people kept working; they had a mind to work.

Now the next part of the story may be the saddest part of this chapter. Discouragement came from within the ranks.

[Neh. 4:10-12](#)

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

Under the threat of enemy attack, fear and discouragement settled in to weak hearts. Now here's what we need to notice about this -- when the people of Judah offered their complaints and murmuring, **THEY**

WERE EXPRESSING THEIR EMOTIONS NOT THEIR FAITH !! When they talked about "giving out," and all the rubble and the power of the enemy, they were telling how they felt. They were not expressing faith; they were expressing their emotions.

And the same kind of thing can happen to local churches. You come for Bible study on Wednesday night and maybe there are like 18 or 20 people, or less. And you begin to express how you feel about that - "I just don't know if we can make it... such a pitiful little bunch... the other churches have so many people... the devil is so powerful." That's not faith talking -- that's the emotion of fear and discouragement.

Faith says: Let's just do what's right. Faith says: let's turn adversity into advantage. Faith says: in spite of the trials, conflicts and circumstances - we are still going to obey God.

Nehemiah -- their godly leader -- responded to this by telling the people: do not be afraid; remember the lord.

[Neh. 4:13-14](#)

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

From a human standpoint it might be argued, Nehemiah missed a good place to give up. But he didn't give up against these odds. He stood up and said, "Don't be afraid of these guys... you need to **REMEMBER THE LORD**. These guys are weaklings ... the Lord is great and awesome and He is on our side."

Verse 15 says they kept working.

[Neh. 4:15](#)

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.

Don't ever stop working! Enemies, problems, discouragement -- **DON'T EVER STOP WORKING**. Now notice - these people were building and watching.

[Neh. 4:16-18](#)

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed

with me.

[Neh. 4:21-23](#)

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

They had to build and fight. The story gives us the vivid picture of these men with a brick in one hand and a sword in the other. And that certainly says something about our work, our function. We must use the Word of God to build ourselves up. But we must also watch and guard and fight. The day we put the Sword down the devil will break through and steal!

Finally would you notice in verses 19 & 20: Our God will fight for us!

Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

If we depend upon our own strength, our own methods, our own numbers; we will be soundly defeated. The only way we can be victorious is to depend upon God, and just keeping following His Word, regardless of our numbers ... **AND OUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US !!**

Think about this: Never after any victory in Bible history; never did God appear on the scene after the battle and say to His people: "I have to hand to you. You did it all by yourself; all I did was watch and you overcame the enemy." You will not find such a passage.

Here's what you'll find: David said to God, "for you have armed Me with strength for the battle," {2 Sam. 22:40}. Nehemiah was not acting alone in this work, and in the battle. And we are not "on our own!" When I use the Sword of the Spirit to defeat temptation ... when I use some part of this armor of God to protect myself ... when I struggle against the principalities and powers, and accomplish some victory ... I am not fighting this battle alone! There are ultimate issues involved larger than one person or one little church.

And every time we push the enemy back; every time we stand in the evil day and survive some fresh assault of the Devil, God is with us and we need to know, because of Him, and His resources we are able to stand! I know of nothing more comforting and uplifting, than the daily awareness that **WE ARE NOT FIGHTING THE BATTLE ALONE !!** "The battle is not yours, but the Lord's!" (2 Chron. 20:15). Now that makes my point! And Nehemiah had this attitude.

Do you see what a great truth this is? The battle is not yours, but the Lord's. We have just got to realize - as we fight the good fight; as we wrestle against the principalities and powers and face the threats and assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil - God is involved with us. Christ is the captain of our salvation. Other faithful soldiers help us.

And there's more!! Think about this. If the battle is the Lord's, **WHO DO YOU THINK WILL WIN** ultimately ?? God cannot fail; truth and right-eousness cannot be defeated and this is the theme of the last book in the New Testament, Revelation.

And when your mind and heart is bogged down in the thick of the battle, you need to lift your head and call this to mind: **GOD CANNOT FAIL!** That means as long as I rely upon Him and take my orders from the Captain, and wear the whole armor of God, I'm on the right side and cannot be defeated (even though opposed). Regardless of all the Sanballats and Tobiah's in the world - the battle is the Lord's! Now if I'm not faithful about wearing the armor; If I put down the Sword of the Spirit and become lax about following the Captain's orders, I become vulnerable; it's like - **I HANG A TARGET ON MY BACK!!**

But we have this assurance: As long as we rely upon God, and take our orders from the Captain, and wear the whole armor of God we are on the right side and cannot be defeated! David knew this, so he said to God, "for you have armed Me with strength for the battle," {2 Sam. 22:40}. Nehemiah knew this when he said, Our God will fight for us!

And perhaps another lesson we need to get from Nehemiah is: the Almighty God has the ability to create great things from small beginnings; nothing - absolutely nothing - escapes God's ability to resurrect, repair and rebuild ... through people who believe in Him. Do you believe this?

By Warren E. Berkley
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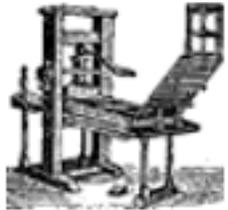
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Thing Which You Are Doing Is Not Good

Nehemiah 5:7-13

It often happens during times of disaster. A hurricane strikes with full fury, leaving a large area of devastation in its path. There is suddenly a great need for lumber, gasoline, food and fresh water. Relief agencies start gearing up, but the need is desperate. Help will eventually arrive, but there are some needs that will not wait.

Private individuals respond; people of good will drive truckloads of donated materials to the stricken area. But there is so many in need and still, not nearly enough coming in. And then, it begins.

Among the kind souls doing the sacrificing are the greedy. They also drive trucks filled with necessities, but they are for sale. A gallon of gasoline; \$30.00; a gallon of drinking water; \$15.00. If you are not willing to pay that inexcusable amount, some other needy soul will. Such behavior is contemptible. Obviously, a person willing to take such advantage of those in need knows absolutely nothing about the love of God nor the kindness and compassion of Jesus, the Son. But such calloused activities are not new.

Nehemiah; The Godly Patriot

"And I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" (Nehemiah 5:9). Nehemiah lived during the time that the remnant of the captives returned to their destroyed homes in and around Jerusalem to rebuild. The nation had spent many years in captivity, the first of them returning home after seventy years, and followed by others.

While Nehemiah is still serving as the cupbearer in the court of Artaxerxes I of Persia, he hears of the hardships of the remnant as they try to rebuild Jerusalem. The whole restoration process is threatened, so Nehemiah intercedes with the king. The king permits Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to oversee the rebuilding project. Later, Nehemiah is made governor in Jerusalem. Nehemiah had much to deal with as "city manager." He had to face the enemies of the Jews, who would from time to time make surprise attacks on the builders. The governor of Samaria (Sanballat), the governor of Ammon (Tobiah) and the governor of Dedan (Gesham) had formed a secret alliance against the Jews. These governors waged a propaganda campaign against the Jews, including mocking their efforts, threats and false charges that Nehemiah was planning on rebelling against the king.

He also had to deal with inner problems and conflicts among the Jews. Some were very demoralized.

Others sought to take advantage of the situation by forcing their own countrymen to sell their property and sometimes even make their children servants of others to raise money to pay the king's taxes. Food was scarce as well; those that had it were willing to take financial advantage of those that didn't. Nehemiah addresses this particular problem in our text (Nehemiah 5:1-13).

Nehemiah's Anger at Unrighteousness

"Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words." (Nehemiah 5:6). The outcry was from the people who had come back to resettle the land. They had faced many hardships and dangers. Their families were hungry and sought food. Because of the scarcity of food, they were having to mortgage their fields, vineyards and homes to pay for something to eat as well as to pay their taxes to Persia. Even their children were becoming indentured servants to help raise needed cash. It was either take these drastic measures, or starve. It seemed like a hopeless situation (vss. 1-5).

Nehemiah became angry, especially when he found that it was the rulers and noblemen of the Jews, those who were the leaders of their communities, that were enriching themselves at the people's expense.

Nehemiah's Call for Unselfish Brotherhood

"And I consulted with myself, and contended with the nobles and rulers and said to them, 'You are exacting usury, each from his brother!' Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. And I said to them, 'We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?' Then they were silent and could not find a word to say." (Nehemiah 5:7,8). Nehemiah appealed to brotherhood as a reason to cease taking such cruel advantage of others in this time of great need. He reminded the leaders of the people of all the difficulties they had endured and the sacrifices they had made to gather these former captives together from foreign lands of bondage so they could return and rebuild their homeland. Now, they were forcing them to become as slaves all over again; had they been freed from foreign masters only to become slaves of one another?

Today, it is the disciple of Jesus Christ that ought to understand better than anyone the nature of brotherhood, compassion and love. In such a selfish world, who more than Christians ought to be the ones showing the way. And what better example is there of unselfish love and goodwill than that of our Redeemer; Jesus of Nazareth? This is precisely the point that John emphasizes in his first epistle. We had best remember it (I John 2:7-11; 3:13-18; 4:16-21; 5:1-3).

Nehemiah's Courage

"Again I said, The thing which you are doing is not good..." (Nehemiah 5:9a). Nehemiah made it clear that this was an evil thing that was being done. Sometimes, it is a dangerous thing to tell powerful men that their source of prosperity is not good. Greed many times overrules a man's sense of morality. Nehemiah is putting it all on the line here. He does not know how it will be with these men; will their morality win over greed in their consciences? Or will it be the other way around?

Whether in Nehemiah's day, or in our own day, with some getting rich in drugs, prostitution, pornography, godless entertainment, and corruption; it is always possible for greed to win in a "let the others be damned" attitude of a cruel and heartless man or woman. WHEN everybody is looking out for

number one, then nobody will win.

Nehemiah's Concern for Reputation

"...should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" (Nehemiah 5:9b). What will others say, Nehemiah suggests, if the Jews, God's people, continue to treat one another as badly as their enemies had treated them? How the words of reproach always fly when those who wear God's name lower themselves to live by the typical standards of the world!

"Everybody does it" is not a proper standard of conduct for the Christian! We do not determine our standards of honesty, morality or human relationships based upon what others do, but rather, on the love and example of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30).

Nehemiah's Fix of the Problem

"Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves...and they said, 'We will give it back, and will require nothing from them...' And all the assembly said, 'Amen!' And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise." (Nehemiah 5:11-13). It was time for cleansing. Not a lukewarm or partial change, but complete upheaval of the motive of greed. They simply could not afford the consequences of continuing this way. The city and all their work would die. Purity was needed.

So it was time for thoroughness then, as it is today. We seek not to be just a little bit greedy, or a little bit dishonest, or a little bit immoral. To be satisfied with such is to fail. It is God who calls upon us to "be holy as I am holy." (I Peter 1:14-16). Anything less is not enough.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 8.6; June 2001

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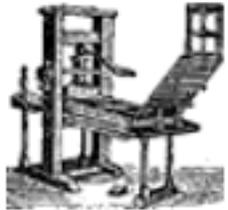
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Acceptable Worship Assemblies

Nehemiah 8:1-12

"Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had commanded Israel . . ."

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSEMBLING

What would you hear if you could listen to the sounds at your neighbors house on Sunday morning? Would it be the sound of boats being prepared for a day of fishing at the lake? Would it be the sound of golf clubs being thrown into the trunk of the car in anticipation of an early morning round of golf? Or would it just be the snoring of those who enjoy sleeping late on the weekend? In a some houses you might hear the scurrying about of families preparing to "go to church."

It is important to Christians that they regularly assemble with other Christians to study and to worship God . By my count, those who are members of the congregation where I attend have attended nearly 120 services already this year. Such an emphasis on assembling is well placed. The inspired writer of Hebrews said in Heb. 10:25, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is . . ."

True Christians believe that it is important, not just that they assembly frequently to worship God, however, but that they do so in the way that He prescribed. Otherwise, all those practically hundreds of sermons, prayers, songs, etc. will be of no value. Jesus said of some of the people of His day, "In vain they do worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Amos 5:21-23 records a time when God totally rejected the worship of Israel saying, "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savior your sacred assemblies."

Men take many approaches today to make worship services "successful." Well-designed church buildings provide a worshipful atmosphere, choirs and great organs deliver uplifting music, and preachers present short and positive sermons. Such misplaced efforts often focus on how worship can be made more interesting and enjoyable to the participant rather than to making it more acceptable to God. Most often the problem with worship is not with the worship environment but rather with the hearts and attitudes of the worshippers.

How do we ensure that our worship is not "vain" and that it is not rejected by God? One way is find an

example of worship in the Bible that pleased God and to emulate the attitudes that those worshippers had. Such an example occurred when the remnant of Jews returned to Canaan from Babylonian captivity and, under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. This worship was recorded in Neh. 8. Let's examine this passage and see what we can learn about acceptable worship services.

ZEAL FOR THE ASSEMBLY

Verse 1 says that "all the people gathered together as one man." We can learn several things from this wording. The primary implication is that all the people that could attend this assembly. It wasn't that just the few who felt like it attended while the others stayed home. Compare this situation with that of many assemblies of local churches. On Sunday morning, most members attend, on Sunday night somewhat less, and only a fraction of the total membership is present on Wednesday night.

The excellent attendance of this assembly is seen to be even more notable when we understand that the people attended because they wanted to, and not because they were ordered to. Verse one says that "they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses." They requested this service, not Ezra. In many congregations today, preachers and elders must continually plead with members to get them to attend the services of the church. The attitude of many members is reflected by questions such as, "Do I really have to attend every assembly?" "Do I have to attend on Wednesday night?" Some of them sound like those of Malachi's day whose response to worship was, "Oh, what a weariness!" (Mal. 1:13). In contrast, David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psm. 122:1). When we have the kind of attitude toward worship that David did, we will attend every assembly that we can.

THEY WERE UNITED IN PURPOSE

The fact that those in Neh. 8 "gathered as one man" also indicates that they were united in purpose. Division among brethren makes acceptable worship difficult or impossible. Paul pleaded with the Christians at Corinth that "you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you" (1 Cor. 1:10). The psalmist David said, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

THEY WERE ATTENTIVE

Some Christians seem to be as committed to attending the assemblies as those of Nehemiah's day were yet when they get to those services, they don't seem to be all that interested in what is going on. They daydream during the prayers, cut their nails during the songs, and write notes to others during the sermon. This is not the kind of attitude and behavior that we see in Neh. 8. Verse 3 says, "The ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law." This is not surprising in view of the obvious importance that they assigned to this assembly. Paying attention will be easier when we realize that it is the very word of God that is under consideration (1 Thes. 2:13) and that it has the power to save our souls (Rom. 1:16). It will also help to remember who it is that we have come together to worship "the King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16).

THEY HAD MADE PREPARATION

Notice that the service of Neh. 8 was not just a spur of the moment event. The people had determined in advance to have this service and then made careful preparation for it. This is indicated by the fact that they had built a special platform for Ezra to stand on as he read the law (see verse 4). If our services are to be as successful as this one was, we also will need to make preparations. That might include going to bed at a reasonable hour the night before, doing our Bible class lesson as assigned, and leaving home in time to be at the place of meeting on time. Teachers, preachers, song leaders, and others having a part in leading the worship activities have a responsibility prepare themselves to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

THEY WERE REVERENT

An important characteristic of the worshippers in Neh. 8 was their reverent attitude. When the Book was read, they all stood up (verse 5). Later they "bowed their heads and worshipped God with their faces to the ground" (verse 6). The position of their bodies presents a good indication of the attitude of their hearts. They understood that they were worshipping the almighty King of the universe and the one who is worthy of all praise, honor, and glory. If our worship is to be acceptable, it must be offered in the same reverent manner. God told Moses, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified" (Lev. 10:3). The inspired writer of Hebrews wrote, "Let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28).

THEY WERE ACTIVELY INVOLVED

Some who attend church assemblies see their role as being quite passive. It is as though they come to watch worshipping done instead of to do it themselves. They sit there waiting for things to happen to them; to be taught, to hear beautiful singing, to be mentally stimulated. But note that the word "worship" is a verb denoting action. It is something that each worshipper does. The worshippers of Neh. 8 certainly understood that. When the Law was read they stood up (verse 5). They responded with "amen" to Ezra's words of praise to God (verse 6) and as we noted above, they bowed their faces to the ground and worshipped. They were actively involved in the worship service. There is a lesson here for modern worshippers. Each one should join in the song service (Col. 3:16), listen carefully to the public prayers so that a sincere "amen" can be given (1 Cor. 14:14-16), consider carefully the teaching and preaching (Acts 17:11; 1 Thes. 2:13) and partake thoughtfully of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THEIR ASSEMBLY AND WORSHIP?

We have seen that the assembly of the worshippers in Neh. 8 was characterized by zeal, unity, attentiveness, preparation, reverence, and active participation. But what, if anything, was the result of their assembly? Was it just a brief emotional experience with no lasting impact? Was it just few hours spent in doing their religious duty after which they returned the business as usual? Not at all.

THEY LEARNED GOD'S WILL

One result of this service was that the people came to better understand the will of God for their lives. Ezra and those assisting him "read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (verse 8). Then all the people rejoiced greatly "because they understood the words that were declared unto them" (verse 12). Some modern assemblies concentrate,

not on the word of God, but on social problems, politics, or a variety of other subjects. Consequently, those attending are unlikely to experience the learning that characterized the assembly of Neh. 8.

THEY OBEYED WHAT THEY LEARNED

While learning is an inevitable result of acceptable assemblies, it is not enough. James exhorts his readers to "be doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jam. 1:22). We see such an obedient attitude modeled by those of Nehemiah's day. When their study revealed that there was a certain feast that they had not been observing correctly, they immediately repented and obeyed what they had learned (Neh. 8:13-17). On a later occasion, when they came to understand that the law prohibited them from association with Ammorites or Moabites, they again obeyed without question or delay (Neh. 13:1-3). The lesson for us is clear. Truly successful worship services result in worshippers being taught God's word and in obedience to that teaching.

IN CONCLUSION . . .

Worship is an important part of God's plan for Christians but if not offered correctly, it will be in vain. We learn from the example of Neh. 8 that acceptable worship involves unity, zeal, attentiveness, preparation, reverence, and involvement. Assemblies for worship and Bible study should result in an increased knowledge of God's will and a determination to obey that will to the best of our ability.

What about your worship; do you have the attitudes discussed above? Are you continuing to learn more about God will for your life? Are you willing to obey without question what you learn to be right?

By James E. Law
From Expository Files 1.11; November, 1994

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

They Read in the Book...and Gave the Sense

Nehemiah. 8:8

"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." (Neh. 8:8)

The return to Jerusalem from 70 years of Babylonian captivity occurred in three stages: 1)- Zerubbabel returns to build the temple, 2)- after a gap of 57 years Ezra returns to reform the people and 3)- 12 years later Nehemiah returns to rebuild the walls of the city. It was immediately following the reconstruction of the city walls that events of Nehemiah chapter eight took place.

Nehemiah brought great energy and courage to the building of the walls. The success of this project led to a dramatic change in the attitude of the people of Judah. Their self-respect had been recovered by their victory over their enemies; their awareness of God's presence had been stirred. Gathering together to celebrate and praise God, Nehemiah put forward Ezra the scribe "to bring out the Book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel" (8:1). All the people gathered to hear Ezra read and interpret the words. (Note: The interpretation was necessary because by this time the language of the people was Aramaic not the classical Hebrew of the Old Testament documents. Ezra had to read in the original, translate, and explain.) (The Teacher's Commentary by Larry Richards, pp. 307-08.)

Matthew Henry suggests that the activities of Neh. 8:1-8 are "an account of a solemn religious assembly, and the good work that was done in that assembly, to the honor of God and the edification of the church." (Commentary on the Whole Bible, v. 2, p. 844.)

Hear what Henry has to say about verse eight.

What they read, they expounded, showed the intent and meaning of it, and what use was to be made of it; they gave the sense in other words, that they might cause the people to understand the reading. Note: 1)- It is requisite that those who hear the word should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words, Mt. 24:15. 2)- It is therefore required of those that are teachers by office that they explain the word and give the sense of it. Understandest thou what thou readest? and, Have you understood all these things? are good questions to be put to the hearers; but, How should we except someone guide us? is as proper a question for them to put to their teachers, Acts 8:30,31. Reading is good and preaching is good, but expounding brings the reading and the teaching together and thus makes the reading the more intelligible and the preaching more convincing. (Ibid, p. 845.)

Giving the sense is an awesome responsibility laid upon the shoulders of those that would teach and preach the word of God. The warning given by James in chapter three and verse one is a reminder that those of us that have chosen to teach are under a "stricter judgment."

With all of these thoughts in mind, coupled with Paul's admonition to young Timothy to "be diligent (study) to show yourself approved before God," how may a person read and study the Word so that they might convey their thoughts in a way that would "give the sense?" How can a person learn what the Bible teaches?

Check the Context

Real Estate agents say that there are only three important things to check out when looking for a piece of property: location, location and location! Something similar could be said as to the three most important aspects to successful Bible study: context, context, and context. If the passage you are reading is hard to understand, broaden your reading to the whole chapter. But, remember, the translators added the chapter divisions, so you may have to broaden your reading to include more than one chapter. You may have to read an entire book before you understand the meaning of any particular verse or passage. Here is where a topical Bible, Concordance, or chain reference Bible can come in handy. Use these tools to find similar or parallel passages and compare and contrast their contexts.

Ask Questions

The Ethiopian Nobleman knew he needed help, so he asked Philip to explain the scriptures to him. We know that the first century church circulated the letters of Paul so that more people could be exposed to his knowledge. Today we can pose questions to one another in person, via email and written correspondence. Most preachers allow some forum for questions concerning their sermons, as do Bible class teachers.

Consult Reference Works and Workbooks

Sometimes an English or Bible dictionary can be of assistance (Note: concupiscence as used in Rom. 7:8) or perhaps a modern translation of the Bible (concupiscence = evil desire, NKJ). To help understand geography a Bible Atlas is very helpful. A Bible Encyclopedia is worthwhile for studying concepts, as is a topical Bible. To get the Jewish perspective on the first century world as it pertains to the Bible lands a study of the works of Josephus might be in order.

Some students have shown an inordinate fear of reference works, especially commentaries. The careful student can and should consult commentaries (by the way, this magazine is a commentary), but the key is to be wary. Commentaries are not God's word, they are someone attempting to "give the sense" of the Word. Using anyone else's Bible materials must be done with caution. This applies to brethren's writings as well as denominational commentators.

With that disclaimer, I must say that I gain much from listening to and reading the thoughts of others. Whether from a commentary, a Bible dictionary, a sermon outline, a magazine (such as The Expository Files), or from personal correspondence, Bible scholars (living and dead, brethren and denominationalists) have many insights that a single person would not be able to glean in their lifetime. An approach that I have found helpful when using a commentary is to first come to some understanding of the passage on my own, then consult a commentary (or the preacher). Treat the commentator as someone you are having a conversation with. The nice thing about disagreeing with the commentator is you can slam down his book and get back to the Bible at any moment. (Please do not try this with the preacher!) Getting out of a conversation with a live person will take more courtesy, time, and tact.

Many of the same tactics must be used with a Bible workbook. Find out about the author, read the workbook thoroughly before presenting it to a class or student, and do not be afraid to abandon the workbook if it veers to far a field. It is important for the teacher to learn from the workbook, before presenting to the student. If the workbook is in harmony with the Bible, the teacher can absorb the points needed from the workbook and set it aside. No student I have ever known received much edification from being read to verbatim from a workbook, commentary, or even the teacher's own notes.

Use Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

Colossians 3:16 sums this point up very nicely. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Doug Yopp has prepared a series of lessons that are worth your attention (<http://www.geocities.com/cdillinger.geo/hymns/phssind.htm>). In this series Doug has examined 54 well-known hymns and outlined a study for each one. If we are going to use hymns for their God-given purpose, then it is imperative that we know what the hymns we are singing mean and be able to convey that meaning to those that ask (e.g.: ebon pinion, Ebenezer, etc).

Familiarize Yourself with False Doctrines

The writings of Peter, Jude, John, and Paul, along with the words of Jesus have much to say about our attitudes towards false teachers and how to combat their apostasy. In your study it may be necessary to track down and study the works of a particular false teacher or publications that preach a false doctrine to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you... (1 Pet. 3:15.)

It will be impossible to answer Calvinism without some understanding of "TULIP." It will be hard to answer Humanism without some familiarity with the Humanist Manifesto. For us to answer, "I do not know what the New Age Movement is but I'm against it!" is not teaching our neighbor who asks anything beyond the scope of our own ignorance. A more effective tactic would be to say, "let's examine the teaching together and hold it up beside God's measuring stick (the Bible) and see how it fares."

Conclusion

Each one of us has the responsibility to teach the Word of God (2 Tim. 4:2). We will need to read the word distinctly and give the sense so our students can understand what they hear. Many of our listeners today are in the same situation as the children of Israel in Nehemiah and Ezra's time; they hear the words, but do not get the sense of the meaning and therefore do not understand what they hear.

Paul asked his Roman readers these questions: "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?" (Rom. 10:14) Might we presume to ask the following: and how shall they understand if the preacher or teacher doesn't give the sense?

One last admonition from the Apostle Paul to those that would be teachers and preachers of the word: "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.)

By Carey Dillinger
From Expository Files 9.12; December 2002

The screenshot shows a website interface with a grey border. At the top, a white banner contains the text "THE EXPOSITORY FILES" in blue, with "FILES" on a yellow background. Below the banner, the text "Hosted By: WWW.BIBLE.CA" is on the left, and "CLICK ON YOUR CHOICE" is in the center. The main content area is divided into several sections:

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The main content area also features four large icons with text below them:

- תורה** (Torah) with a scroll icon, labeled "Expository Old Testament".
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Day The Letter Came

Esther 3

Esther 3

Things changed when Haman was promoted to "Top Prince" of the land. In fact, the subservience of men and their devotions were focused primarily upon this man who had the king's blessings. All of the king's SERVANTS were COMMANDED to bow before Haman and pay him tribute and homage because of his position (Esther 3:2).

Although it may appear without propriety to capitalize the words, "servant" and "commanded," it is important to notice that these terms play a significant role in understanding the issue of this revelation. Mordecai would not bow down and pay homage to Haman for specific reasons. First, he WAS NOT A SERVANT of the king and he was not obligated to obey CIVIL COMMANDS that would undermine and destroy his relationship with the God of heaven. Mordecai refused to compromise the priority to be a servant of God as God had commanded. We see this illustrated in a number of places in the inspired record. When Daniel was kidnapped and taken to Babylon, he refused to eat the portions of the king's meat that was given to him. He refused to stop praying and worshiping the living God. And he did not stand for truth in a closet. Instead, as he had always done, he knelt before his window. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to the idol gods of the land. They refused to compromise the expectations of God. This infuriated Nebuchadnezzar, but it did not change the hearts of the faithful. In the text of our current study, the servants of the king threatened Mordecai daily with the consequence of civil violation, and eventually tattled to Haman. With knowledge of this, the king's highest prince was enraged with wrath and anger because Mordecai would not bow before him and render him acknowledgment. Mordecai's decision would not only effect himself, but it would effect every servant of God that lived in the land.

Haman's thugs cast lots to distinguish which day the first holocaust would be. It fell on the thirteenth day of Adar and the unchangeable decree was written. Haman's office sent out letters to every Jewish household clearly explaining their demise and temporary lives. Everyone would die because Mordecai would not bow to Haman. - Do you think it is highly possible that Mordecai was confronted by some of his brethren that maybe he had made a rash decision and probably needed to think it through a little more? Do you think maybe someone could have suggested that he apologize to Haman and maybe these things would not come about? The fourth chapter describes all of Israel mourning over the news. Mordecai dressed himself in sackcloth and ashes, but he did not waver one inch from the standard of right. Yes, his brethren were effected by this, but the consequence of rejecting God or compromising the

principles of God's will would certainly propagate a greater punishment than that which they were facing.

I like the rendering of the NKJV in Esther 3:14, where it reads, "A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province being published for all people that they should be ready for that day". I wonder if the people of God became more fervent in prayer the day the letter came. I wonder if the songs lifted to heaven in praise to his name were attended to more seriously than they had been before. I wonder if the people of God attended to the law and viewed its teachings more closely. I wonder if their attitudes toward each other was closer knit than it had been the days before. And I wonder if the 13th day of Adar had fallen on the day they were to enter into the place of worship, would every one have shown up, or would there have been some who conveniently were unable to attend on that day. Would they seek places to hide? Would they try to make apologies for Mordecai and for being associated with such a shallow and retro-traditional thinker?

I wonder what would happen if a letter like that came today.

By Tony Ripley
From Expository Files 8.3; March 2001

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Good Job!

Job

He was a good man, known for his loyalty to God, his endurance and patience. Yes, Job was a good man, and from that we get the title of this article.

The New Testament uses Job as an example of patience in the midst of turmoil and horrible tragedy as well as victory after the struggle. Christians are urged to also be patient when times are filled with trial and loss and wait until the Lord comes. His coming is always potentially at hand, and our being with Him is only a breath away. If we endure, even unto death, we shall rejoice. James writes, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful." (James 5:7-11).

When Did Job Live?

The historical references in the Book of Job seem to suggest Job was a faithful man of God who lived sometime between Noah and Moses, making Job a product of the Patriarchal age. First, there are no allusions to the Law of Moses in the book. This seems to suggest that he lived before the Law. Second, Eliphaz refers to a flood that swept away the wicked (22:16). This very likely would refer to the flood of Noah, which had already occurred. Third, as faithful patriarchs did, Job functioned as the spiritual head of his family and offered sacrifice as a priest in their behalf (1:5). Finally, Job's lifespan fit with the later patriarchs (such as Abraham) by living 140 more years after the events of the book (42:16).

Some Lessons of the Book

The book of Job contains many lessons that are applicable to the human experience. Some chief points:

God is great. He deserves our praise, devotion and loyalty regardless of present distresses. He deserves these things because of His majesty as God, our Creator.

Questions about suffering are asked, but not all of them are specifically answered. The lessons include points that man is unable to fathom all the reasons behind suffering, pain and apparent injustice. We must continue to trust God. Also, we learn that suffering is not the result of personal sin, or at least not

necessarily so. In fact, the suffering of the righteous may well be a testing or proving ground.

There perhaps is no better example of human patience and endurance than Job; and the possibility of unlimited and unconditional human loyalty to God.

The Personalities in the Book of Job

The personalities of the book include God, Satan, Job, Job's wife; Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu. Most of the book is a series of debates between Job and his friends. All have some good things to say, but all are also misinformed and mistaken about some of their conclusions. Eliphaz seems the most sympathetic, Bildad is somewhat in between, and Zophar is one of those "with friends like this, who needs enemies?" Elihu is a younger man that speaks up at the end of the debate.

The Great Indictment

Job was a man of remarkable character (1:8). He was concerned by his family's lack of spirituality as they gave themselves constantly to parties. (1:4). Satan makes an accusation against Job, and really all who seek to live righteously before God. The charge is that neither Job (nor anyone else) serves God for nothing. We have to be "bought". We have no true integrity. If God blesses us we will worship Him, but if there are no blessings, then forget it! Satan is pretty cynical about it, having himself failed to keep his proper estate because of his own pride. He insists that we can be no different than Satan himself. (1:9-11). God permits a test. If God is right (and, of course, He is) then the test will prove that we creatures who bear His image are able to be truly devoted to God. They say, "Every man has his price." Satan said it as well. But God says they are wrong! Job proves it for himself and all of us.

In one day, Job suffers the loss of his oxen and donkeys, sheep and camels, servants and his sons and daughters. Job's reaction is a tremendous example of integrity (1:20-22). Disappointed, Satan explains away his mistaken idea about Job by saying the test was not severe enough. The Lord permits Satan to inflict Job's health (2:7,8). Job's wife lacks or loses her faith and Job reprimands her (2:9,10). Ironically, Job's wife reacts just the way Satan had said Job would! This shows us that faith and loyalty is always a choice, and we each can choose to go either way.

When Job's three friends arrive. They are stunned at what they find as they look upon Job (2:11-13).

The Great Debates

Job maintains his integrity throughout the book, in spite of the fact that he is confused about why these awful things have happened to him. He, and his friends, all are under the notion that good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. The friends insist that Job has sinned and needs to repent, and Job insists that he hasn't, and cannot explain why, though righteous, he is suffering so greatly. Job desires several things: he looks forward to death (but never considers taking his own life). He would also like an opportunity to address God face to face and suggest a mistake has been made. A large part of the book consists of points of argument between the friends and Job.

God Speaks

Job gets his wish: an audience with God. The Lord rebukes Job for insinuating things about which he

knows nothing. (38:1-2). God then challenges Job to answer a few questions. God knows the answers; does Job? (38:3). The questions are designed to remind Job of God's power and wisdom. After this, God gives Job his opportunity to speak, but by this time Job is no longer interested because he is convinced he has said too much already (42:1-6). God blesses and restores Job (42:12a; 16,17) We should understand that we can be like Job and other heroes of faith. They were no different than we are in that they chose what they would be and we choose what we will be. What will you choose?

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 8.7; July 2001

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Comparing Job And Peter

Job 1 & Luke 22

Although there are many lessons to learn from the life of Job, one in particular comes to mind at this time. It is apparent from Job chapter 1 that Satan has the ability to call in question the faith of a servant of God (verses 9-11). After accusing God of creating a protective barrier around Job, Satan claimed that if Job were not so protected that he would not stand against temptation. "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (v. 11). Of course, we learn from the text that in all Job suffered he did not sin. The fact that Satan has the ability to call in question one's faith does not mean that he is correct in his evaluation, just that he has the ability to accuse at any time.

I am persuaded that Satan uses this same ability today just as he did in the days of Job and has through the annals of time. When Jesus addressed Peter in Luke 22:31-32, he implied Satan's use of his ability at this time. He said, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" and concluded his remark by saying, "But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not". Satan desired many years before to have Job as well in order to sift him as wheat. In comparison, Satan was wrong about Job but correct in his accusation of Peter. Jesus told Peter that he had prayed that his faith would not fail. Jesus knew that Satan had marked Peter for the purpose of tempting and failure to withstand. The record reveals that the Lord told Peter he would fail and even though Peter fervently denied it, he fell through weakness just as the Lord had said he would and just as the devil had surmised.

With these thoughts in mind, the record of James contains insight to Satan's evaluation of men in the present economy. James stated, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The command to resist the devil demands that at some point in time he will be about the business of temptation. Obviously he tempts every individual based upon his perception of their strength or weakness. Some he is correct about and some he will leave for a season. But do not be deceived, he will use these abilities and opportunities at his leisure on each and every person.

There is no denying that the trials in which Job experienced were severe. They are monumental in example of the arsenal in his grasp. We must not sink into a naive demeanor when it comes to this adversary. Peter said he "walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1Peter5:8). I am convinced that his walking as a roaring lion is nothing new. He was walking in the same way when he approached God concerning Job. A roaring lion is indicative of an animal hungry for the kill. Sometimes the lion gets his prey and sometimes he does not. Nevertheless, his failures make him no less of a hunter and no less vehement in his approach of his next victim. So it is with the devil. To miss the Gazelle only

makes his hunger greater for the Elk. His hunger is never satiated, only challenged.

There is certain irony when comparing the Lord's statement about Job and his remarks concerning Peter. God saw the strengths and weaknesses in these men just as Satan thought he had. God praised Job as a "perfect and upright man and one that feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:8). And yet he told Peter that he had prayed for him and that he would soon fall to temptation. Although Satan has the ability to evaluate man, God also has an evaluation of each and every individual. We are either complete, upright, bearers of God, and shunners of evil or we are weak and likely to succumb to the tricks of the devil. Job feared and revered God as the Creator and Judge of all. Every decision he made in our text was predicated upon his faithfulness to God. Peter loved the Lord but he was not prepared for the temptations of the wicked one. His faith was not what it should have been.

The key is preparation. To live in such a way that when Satan approaches, to be steadfast against error, not by mere intention, but by diligent practice. The success of the devil lays heavily in the lap of his next victim. Are you prepared for Satan's accusations against you? Will he be correct in his evaluation of your faith or will he flee in defeat because of your undying allegiance to the eternal God of heaven?

By Tony Ripley
From Expository Files 6.3; March 1999

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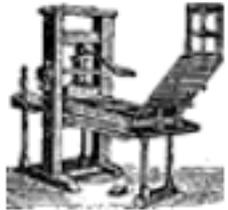
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The Living Redeemer

Job 19:23-27

When we find ourselves in difficult situations, most of us turn to our families to help extract us out of our tight spot. Such aid between family members is expected by God. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (I Timothy 5:8). Friends are wonderful, but we lean on our families when adversity comes (Proverbs 17:17).

In the days of the Old Law, a kinsman had the duty of rescuing his family members from such difficulties as paying off debts, making ransom payments when captured in war, or avenging a relative’s wrongful death. Land in Israel belonged to God who granted portions to various families. At times a person would become so poor that he would have to sell off the family land to meet his debts. When this happened, a relative was expected to buy the land back, so that it would remain in the family (Leviticus 25:23-25). If a man became so poor that he only had himself to sell, his relatives were expected to buy him back from his owner (Leviticus 25:47-49).

When a man was killed, a relative was selected to be the avenger of the murdered man’s blood (Numbers 35:10-12, 15-19). The Hebrew word translated “avenger” is the same word that is translated “redeemer” in other passages. Instead of recovering family land or personal freedom for a relative, the avenger is recovering justice on behalf of his kin.

The whole concept of redemption is beautifully illustrated in the book of Ruth, especially in the fourth chapter when Boaz offers to purchase the family land owned by Naomi and marry Ruth to redeem the family.

It is important that every one understand the concept of redemption because each of us has gotten ourselves into deep trouble. We have all placed ourselves into a debt which we cannot repay. All of us have sinned (Romans 3:9-20, 23), and those sins have justly earned us the penalty of death (Romans 6:23). Who then can cover our debt? How can we extract ourselves from the bondage into which we have sold our souls (Romans 6:16, 19-21)? You see, the redemption of a man’s soul is costly. “No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him – for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease trying forever – that he should live on eternally, that he should not undergo decay.” (Psalm 49:7-9).

Think about it. We have already sold our souls to the devil, so we cannot buy ourselves back. What else

do we possess that we could possibly offer in exchange for our souls? Money and worldly possessions cannot follow us across the river of death (Psalm 49:16-17). Besides, all that is in the world already belongs to the Almighty Creator. Do you see the mess men get themselves into when they sell themselves into sin? But where we are powerless, God is able to redeem (Psalm 49:15).

Throughout the Scriptures God is described as our Father. His Son, Jesus, then is our elder brother. God made us in His blessed image (Genesis 1:26-27). As God is spirit, we too are spiritual beings (John 4:24; Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 64:8). As God is righteous, we too were made righteous, though we have squandered our inheritance. "Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

No relative would rescue someone who refused to acknowledge his relationship. Imagine rich uncle Harry coming to buy his nephew out of slavery only to be told by his nephew, "I refuse to have anything to do with you!" In a similar manner, Jesus expects us to be appreciative of His efforts on our behalf. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Jesus expects us to acknowledge our relationship to Him before others (Matthew 10:32-33).

Still, our Father sent His Son to redeem us from slavery. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:3-5). Jesus was the only appropriate one to redeem mankind and the only appropriate method was by the giving of His own life (Hebrews 2:9-11). We sold ourselves into miserable slavery and our own brother bought us back from our master. What wondrous love is this that was shown to such wretched creatures!

But the price of our release was unimaginably high. "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:17-19). Yes, it was through the blood of Jesus that we have redemption (Ephesians 1:7-8). With His own life He redeemed us from our sins (Titus 2:11-14).

As awesome as this redemption is, we must not neglect to recognize that Jesus is also our avenger. Since the penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23), the one who leads men into sin is a murderer (John 8:44). Jesus' death gave Him the opportunity to destroy the destroyer. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus destroyed death because He did not remain dead (II Timothy 1:9-10). He made a public spectacle out of Satan (Colossians 2:15) and thereby avenged our shameful death at the hands of a mass-murderer.

Job foresaw this wonder of a living redeemer. "Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! That they were engraved on a rock with an iron pen and lead, forever! For I know

that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:23-27). Job was firmly persuaded that his Redeemer lives and that one day He would come to this earth. Job knew that he would see his Redeemer after his own death. The very thought of one day meeting his Redeemer made him faint.

Not only was Jesus given life, He is able to impart life to others (John 5:21-29). It is this fact, that we too will one day live with Jesus, that forms the very core of Christianity (I Corinthians 15:12-14, 20). It is not merely that a death was paid for our sins, but that the One who died was given eternal life, and He will give us eternal life with him one day. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:54-58).

Let all give thanks to God for our Redeemer and our redemption!

By Jeffrey W. Hamilton
From Expository Files 12.6; June 2005

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The Words of Eliphaz

Job 22

In Job chapter 22 there are the words of Eliphaz. Like the others, Bildad and Zophar, Eliphaz assumes that all suffering is punishment for wrong doing. His thinking is: Job is suffering, therefore Job is being punished for wrong doing.

In this study of the words of Eliphaz, we will discover things he said that we believe reflected his wrong concepts and his erroneous theology of suffering. We can learn from his error. But we should also consider, not every word spoken by these men was wrong! Their basic concept of suffering and their repeated accusations against Job were wrong - and they stand corrected and rebuked at the end of the book. But I believe we can learn from their error, but also we can certainly learn from what they said that was true. Having said that - notice, this speech of Eliphaz begins with...

FIVE QUESTIONS (Job 22:2-5)

1. "Can a man be profitable unto God?"

The implied answer would seem to be - NO; the wisest of men, even those of insight and understanding, of prudence and education, cannot benefit or help God. God is perfectly self-sufficient; He has such power and holy character, He does not need to look to us for any benefit or profit.

This may be similar to the thought expressed by Job, back in chapter 21, where he said, "Shall any teach God knowledge, seeing He judgeth those that are high?" The highest of men are accountable to and should submit to God - therefore, nobody can teach God anything.

Now here in Job 22:2 - what this question means, in regard to Job's suffering - is unclear. It may be Eliphaz is saying: it wouldn't be profitable for God; He wouldn't have anything to learn or gain, by testing someone who hadn't sinned. That may be what Eliphaz means - yet, when we just study the question; the question itself demands a negative answer; God doesn't need any benefit or profit from any man.

God doesn't need us for His existence; we cannot teach Him; we cannot help Him or guide Him or make Him complete. He loves us. Yes! He wants us to come to Him, and serve Him and glorify His name. But we need to keep all this in perspective - it is not the case that we offer God some benefit or profit; or that we make him complete. He makes us complete through Christ.

Viewed outside the accusations against Job, this becomes a good, thought-provoking question: CAN A MAN BE PROFITABLE UNTO GOD? And we believe the answer is "No!"

2. "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous?"

Now this is troublesome. There is the insinuation of Eliphaz's question, that God derived neither pleasure nor gain from Job's righteousness. It is true, that God gets no pleasure from wickedness or the folly of fools (Psa. 5:4 & Eccl. 5:4). But it is NOT TRUE that God derives no pleasure from the righteousness of His people.

David said that Jehovah "hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant" (Psa. 35:27), and in Psa. 147:11 - "Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear Him." In Psa. 149:4 - "Jehovah taketh pleasure in his people." So, either Eliphaz misjudged God - or he judged Job's righteousness as feigned and hypocritical.

But again -- for us, outside the context of Eliphaz misconceptions -- the question can provoke worthwhile thought. Our answer would be YES. When we behave right, that pleases God. And I think that should be an important motive for us - to know that when we love and obey God, that pleases him.

3. "...is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" Well, this is about the same thing and the implication troubles us. He seems to be saying or implying - God realizes no pleasure or gain from the uprightness of man. I suppose - in a sense, there is no "gain," depending upon how you define that. But we have cited a number of passages showing - God wants us to be righteous, and he takes pleasure in our uprightness.

4. "Is it for thy fear of him that he reproveth thee, that he entereth with thee into judgment?" Here's the question in verse 4, as rendered in the NIV - "Is it for your piety that he rebukes you and brings charges against you?" It seems Eliphaz begins with the assumptions, ONE, that God is rebuking Job and TWO, that Job is guilty of various sins. This fourth question, here in verse four, seems rather sarcastic - "Job, do you think God is rebuking you for your piety?" Is it for wickedness and sin that he has brought you into judgment?

5. "Is not thy wickedness great?" Well, this question reflects what all three of these men have been saying since they opened their mouth to their suffering friend. In this question, Eliphaz implied that Job's wickedness was great and his iniquities endless. Here again we clearly see the doctrine or theology of suffering advanced by the friends of Job. Their idea was, IF JOB IS SUFFERING, JOB HAS SINNED and if he is suffering horribly, he must have really been bad; his wickedness was great.

Job 22 begins with these five questions and with each question, Eliphaz implies that Job has sinned; that's why he is suffering; "Is not thy wickedness great?"

In Job 22, the Holy Spirit is reported to us what a man said. Given the context of the story about Job, we believe Eliphaz was wrong in his perspective and accusations. But as we read and study his questions, it becomes a good exercise for us to think about these things.

Finally we have some specific and direct accusations. NO EVIDENCE, but accusations in verses 6-11.

ACCUSATIONS (6-11)

ACCUSATION #1 -- Taking pledges for nothing (6).

According to the Mosaic Law and apparently before that, in the Patriarchal dispensation -- it was wrong to take a pledge or security from someone un-justly or without cause or reason.

An extreme or exaggerated example of this would be: "I'll loan you some money, but you must give me your best clothing." So I've helped you with the cash you need, but I've left you naked. This was wrong and this is what Eliphaz said Job had done: "You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked."

Is there any evidence Job was guilty of this charge? No evidence or proof was given.

And in fact what did God say about Job just before the tragedy? "...there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil," (1:8). We conclude -- the charge was unfounded.

ACCUSATION #2 -- Unmerciful; lack of hospitality (7).

NIV: "You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry." Again, there is no evidence of this. We know, in the desert country hospitality was an unwritten law and to withhold water from the weary and bread from the hungry, was a grievous breach of kindness (Abraham, Gen. 18; Lot, Gen. 19). Yet, no evidence exists - to establish Job was guilty of this.

ACCUSATION #3 - The unscrupulous exercise of power (8).

NIV: "though you were a powerful man, owning land -- an honoured man, living on it." KJV: "But as for the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it." I include this as an accusation because I think there is an implication here, that in these things Job allegedly did, Job was misusing his position of influence, wealth and power. But again - no evidence.

ACCUSATION #4 - Heartless cruelty to widows and orphans (9).

Verse 9 (NIV) - "And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless." This was probably the cruelest charge of all, declaring that Job acquired his vast estate by robbing the widows and fatherless of what was theirs. Job will later deny this - and of course, Eliphaz made the charge but gave no evidence. Eliphaz just knows Job has done something horrible to cause all this suffering, so he just pulls the accusations out from his imagination; offering no evidence.

Conclusion - "snares are round about thee," etc. (vss. 10,11).

Verses 10,11 is the conclusion, in the mind of Eliphaz:

That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, why it is so dark that you cannot see, and why a flood of water covers you. (Job 22:10-11, NIV).

This makes the position of Eliphaz pretty clear, doesn't it? His questions and his accusations have a purpose, and the purpose is - TO PUT JOB IN HIS PLACE; TO PERSUADE HIM THAT HE IS SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE HORRIBLE THINGS HE HAS DONE. We believe Eliphaz is

wrong; indeed this human theology of suffering is denied near the end of the book and Job's character is vindicated at the first of the book. But I say again - it is good for us to read and study the speech of Eliphaz; it provokes thoughts and challenges us to consider things worthwhile. Next ...

JOB IS CHALLENGED TO RETHINK HIS POSITION (12-20).

"Is not God in the heights of heaven? And see how lofty are the highest stars! Yet you say, 'What does God know? Does he judge through such darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens.' Will you keep to the old path that evil men have trod? They were carried off before their time, their foundations washed away by a flood. They said to God, 'Leave us alone! What can the Almighty do to us?' Yet it was he who filled their houses with good things, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked. "The righteous see their ruin and rejoice; the innocent mock them, saying, 'Surely our foes are destroyed, and fire devours their wealth.' (Job 22:12-20, NIV).

Certainly, God is in the heights of heavens; without any doubt the stars are lofty. **BUT JOB DIDN'T DENY THIS.** Job had expressed his doubts, and had said some unwise things - but he hadn't turned away from God...

Yet, Eliphaz admonished Job: "Will you keep to the old path that evil men have trod? They were carried off before their time, their foundations washed away by a flood."

Notice some of the things Eliphaz said about **THE WICKED** in this section:

In Verse 17 the wicked are those who say to God, "DEPART FROM US." The wicked are those who boast, "WHAT CAN THE ALMIGHTY DO FOR US?" Now, Job had not lived this way; Job had not adopted these rebellious attitudes, but Eliphaz was right; this is the attitude of the wicked; it is like they say to God: "Depart from us. What can God do for us?"

Sinners do not want God. God disturbs their plans, their thoughts, dreams and life style. Their attitude is, **WHAT CAN THE ALMIGHTY DO FOR US?** "Yet he filled their houses with good things," in verse 18. In spite of the sinner's claim that God can do nothing for them, **IT WAS GOD WHO FILLED THEIR HOUSES WITH GOOD THINGS !!**

They took good things from God, and then claimed they didn't need God and lived sinful lives. That happened back then, and it happens today. **JOB WAS NOT GUILTY OF THIS KIND OF WICKEDNESS,** but what Eliphaz said about the wicked is true.

Verses 19,20:

"The righteous see their ruin and rejoice; the innocent mock them, saying, 'Surely our foes are destroyed, and fire devours their wealth!'"

Eliphaz believes the wicked people always come to ruin and when they do, the righteous rejoice and those who are innocent mock them. They say: "Surely our foes are destroyed and fire devours their wealth." The doctrine and attitude of Eliphaz is clear in these verses but he has failed to prove that Job's wickedness caused his suffering. And he offers no evidence that wicked people always suffer while

righteous people never suffer. Now, here's the part of Job 22 that I really like to study...

A FINAL APPEAL TO JOB: Return to God (21-30)

Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you. Accept instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent and assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines, then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you. Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God. You will pray to him, and he will hear you, and you will fulfil your vows. What you decide on will be done, and light will shine on your ways. When men are brought low and you say, 'Lift them up!' then he will save the downcast. He will deliver even one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands." (Job 22:21-30, NIV).

After you expose someone's sin; and after you point out the end of the wicked, **YOU CLOSE THE SERMON WITH AN INVITATION TO REPENT**. That's what this is! This is an Old Testament example of an invitation, although offered from one who needed to respond!

Eliphaz thinks he has settled the matter, that he has established Job's sin; now he calls upon Job to submit to God, repent, be at peace with god . . and thereby good shall come unto thee. This sounds like a preaching at the end of a sermon ...

"If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent and assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines, then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you." {While together we stand and sing...-added, web!}

Eloquently expressed. I could use this as an invitation or exhortation when I preach. **THE ONLY PROBLEM IS** - Job did not have wickedness in his tent; God said of him: "...there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil," (1:8).

"Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God. You will pray to him, and he will hear you, and you will fulfil your vows. What you decide on will be done, and light will shine on your ways. When men are brought low and you say, 'Lift them up!' then he will save the downcast. He will deliver even one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands."

Take these words outside the context of Job's situation and outside the context of the doctrine of Eliphaz, and you have a moving, impressive invitation to sinners - to give up their sin and be delivered by God!

JOB 22 - one of the speeches of Eliphaz; and there are four things I would like for us to think about: The fact that a man knows some truth about God does not mean all his conclusions are correct. All of these friends of Job - all of them manifest some knowledge of God. It cannot be argued that everything they said was false. We believe some of the things they said to Job and about Job were wrong - but all of them knew some truth about God.

We may hear men; we may read books written by men, and we are convinced - they know some truth about God. But this does not mean all their conclusions and doctrines are correct. This brings me to an old truth that needs to be reviewed - we need to do what the Bereans did - those were the people in Acts 17 who searched the Scriptures daily to find out if what they were hearing was true.

Though Eliphaz was wrong about Job - He said some true things about God. And one thing he said was - **GOD IS PERFECTLY SELF-SUFFICIENT**; that truth needs to be part of our concept of God. God does not need our help, our instruction, our guidance or counsel. He is the Almighty, All wise omnipotent God who Created the heavens and the earth ... what counsel can we give Him? None. But we can and should listen to Him, study His Word ... out of our reverence for Him, we ought to think what He wants us to think, and act and He wants us to act. He doesn't need us to be complete, but we need to Him to be complete - a promise we enjoy in Christ.

Though Job was not guilty of these things, Eliphaz did expose some horrible sins in the sight of God. Those who engage in these things may not suffer immediate retribution in physical suffering - as Eliphaz and the others believed; but these are horrible things - and perhaps this passage can help us think about and recognize the repugnance of this kind of behavior. This is what happens when we do not think and act as God directs - selfishness takes over ... and we may eventually abuse and use our fellow man, as Eliphaz describes.

4. Finally, in verses 21-26 - there is rich teaching for each one of us to take to heart. Everything here - we ought to do:

Submit to God.

Be at peace with Him - through Christ that's possible!

Accept instruction from His mouth.

Lay up his words in your heart.

Verse 23 describe repentance: "If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: if you remove wickedness far from your tent..."

We need to regard God as precious and valuable - find our delight in Him, and lift our face toward Him ... pray to Him, "and he will hear you."

And verse 30 is an eloquent statement of God's power to deliver us and save us **EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE NOT BEEN INNOCENT.**

I guess you can tell, I just think this is a marvelous passage; and I'm persuaded that our problem may be -- **WHEN WE READ THE BOOK OF JOB, WE GO INTO IT WITH AN ATTITUDE ABOUT THESE FRIENDS, AND THAT ATTITUDE MAY KEEP US FROM LEARNING SOME VALUABLE THINGS.** Yes -- they were wrong in some of the things they said. At the end of the book, God says to Eliphaz: "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So God said they were wrong - they repented (Job 42:9), and Job prayed for them. All of this granted - there are some things these men said which were true and are true... and from those

things we are afforded an opportunity to think about some things we need to consider today.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 5.11; November 1998

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The Godly & Ungodly In Psalms One

Psalm 1

THE GODLY MAN ... HIS POSITIVE CHARACTER:

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord." The Christian life is not one merely of giving up this or that, but it is entering into a new and happy inheritance in the Word of God. True, the prodigal son had to give up some things to come back. But what were they? The swine troughs and his rags! In exchange he acquired the best robe and the joys of a happy home. The godly man gives up the entanglements of sin, for the delight of God's law!

"And in His law he meditates day and night." The modern voices of secular values and occult interests urge us to MEDITATE, without specifying a worthy object of meditation. The godly man meditates on the law of God, and from that meditation receives spiritual strength and health. One telling test of a man's character is this: UPON WHAT DOES HE MEDITATE DAY AND NIGHT? (See Phil. 4:8)

THE GODLY MAN ... WHAT HE IS LIKE:

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." Here is the result of the godly man's character, negative and positive: SPIRITUAL FRUITFULNESS AND PROSPERITY.

If you want a life such as this; if you want to be a like a healthy, thriving, fruitful tree "whose leaf also shall not wither," do the things outlined in Psalms 1:1,2. "Blessed is this man!"

The first part of the chapter describes the blessedness of the godly man. HIS NEGATIVE CHARACTER lies in his refusal to walk in the counsel of the ungodly; staying away from the path of sinners, and not sitting in the seat of the scornful. HIS POSITIVE CHARACTER lies in his delight in the law of the Lord, and his practice of meditation therein, day and night. As a result of this good character, there is spiritual benefit: "And whatever he does shall prosper."

The last part of the psalm show WHAT THE GODLY MAN IS NOT LIKE. It is a description of the ungodly.

"The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall

not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

First, the ungodly are described as having the opposite behavior as the godly. After the description of the godly in verses 1-3, the writer says: "THE UNGODLY ARE NOT SO," that is, they are living in another fashion.

They are "like the chaff." This term "chaff" is used throughout the Scriptures as an emblem of what is weak and worthless (see Job 21:18; Dan. 2:35, and Matt. 3:12). In ancient times chaff was considered of no value, and when corn was winnowed, it was thrown up in the air until the wind had blown all the chaff away. Hence the ungodly are pictured by this language as weak, of no value; something to be thrown out, "which the wind driveth away."

What a way to live! Think of the reality of living a life that is worthless, of no value ... compared to something that is good for nothing, but to be thrown out.

"Therefore," because of this worthless life, "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." While the wicked may be proud, arrogant and high-minded in this day. In the last day the wicked will not be able to hold up their heads. They will have no security, and will have no place with the righteous. There will be a great separation (Matt. 25:31-46).

On the other hand, "the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." Here, simply stated, is the end to which all men are headed. In the world there are good and bad - righteous and unrighteous. Their character and behavior are entirely different. And the Bible teaches, all things will eventuate in the salvation of the righteous, and the destruction of the wicked.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 2.1; January, 1995

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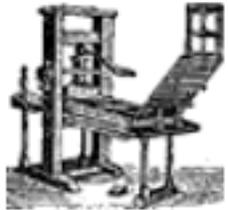
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The First Beatitude In Psalms

Psalm 1:1

The book of Psalms opens with a beatitude. "**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful,**" (Psa. 1:1).

This is a description of a God-centered life. Those who live this way are "blessed." That frequent biblical word contains more than what we call "happiness" in contemporary use. Our word "happy" has to do with "happenings." Something happens that makes us happy. The biblical concept of "blessedness" goes much deeper; it signifies a deep sense of joy based on your God-centered way of life. "Happiness" in modern use depends upon events or happenings; "blessedness" in biblical use is not influenced by events, it is based on one's good relationship with God. An illustration of this is - Jesus spoke to His disciples about the joy or blessedness they would have; in the same conversation He told them they would be hated and persecuted. "Blessed are you when men persecute you." The "man" or person of Psalms 1:1 possesses blessedness because his life is God-centered. There is a depth of comfort, satisfaction and contentment he enjoys regardless of the events of life because His life doesn't depend upon events but upon His relationship with God.

He walks not in the council of the ungodly. Think about a child of God, staying close to his Father; walking with God, joining with others who walk with God. This child of God does not seek the counsel of the ungodly! This person gains motivation and guidance from his father, and good influence and association from his brothers and sisters. The God-centered person does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. (Can you imagine attempting to gain self-improvement and spiritual stimulation by watching the Jerry Springer Show?)

He does not stand in the path of sinners. Apparently, the God-centered person is very careful about companionship. And, if you are walking in the pathway of righteousness (with God, toward heaven, following Christ) - why would you stand in the path of sinners? The path of sinners moves in the opposite direction from your destination!

He does not sit in the seat of the scornful. It is possible that the Holy Spirit is picturing for us a steady digression away from God and into sin. Walking, standing and then sitting may replicate that digression away from God. The point is, the God-centered person doesn't do this. The godly person avoids sin, stays on the right pathway, shuns the counsel of the ungodly, etc. In other words, this kind of person stays far away from sin and close to God. The result is - this person is blessed; biblical blessedness, not worldly happiness.

Is your life God-centered? Are your thoughts, decisions, attitudes and actions ordered by the Word of God, or do you take the advice of deceitful, wicked men? The person who lives a God-centered life "shall be like a tree planted" in fertile, well-watered soil that brings forth fruit in it's season!

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 6.12; December 1999

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Is There Any Hope?

Psalm 3

Many years ago a submarine was rammed by another ship and quickly sank. Despite many efforts by many ships to rescue the crew it was feared their oxygen would run out long before anyone could get to them. Hours into the desperate tragedy the sonar men listening for any indication of life on the crippled sub heard a tapping, suddenly realizing it was the dots and dashes of Morse code. The question came slowly: "is... there... any... hope?"

That's the question we all ask. In a turbulent world, full of difficulties, depression, discouragement we want to know if there is any hope. We may feel overwhelmed by the financial or material or economic situations we are in. Or the difficulties of holiness in an unholy time, of being pure in the midst of so much impurity intimidate us and bother us. Perhaps we are concerned for our kids, or our parents, or some other loved one who is not serving the Lord. There is plenty to worry about today. So we ask "is there any hope?"

If you feel that way then Psalm 3 is for you. It was written by David, at a time when his whole life had been turned upside down. It articulates for us the concerns of our hearts before the Lord, and leads us to greater trust in God. Let's study Psalm 3!

Introduction to the Psalm

This psalm has a number of notable firsts to its credit. 1 It is the first psalm in the collection of psalms ascribed to David (3-41), and is the first of thirteen psalms to bear a superscription giving us historical data about the psalm. Further, it is the first lament psalm, a cry for help. Finally, it is the first psalm to use the term "selah," a term that is probably a musical notation perhaps meaning pause.

It is that historical setting that arrests our attention. David wrote this, in all probability, while actually fleeing for his life from Absalom. As a result of his sin with Bathsheba David was promised trouble in his house. What came he could scarcely have imagined -- his own son Absalom attempted to take the kingdom from him by force (read 2 Samuel 15:6ff for the background here). The situation became so grave that David actually left the walled fortress of Jerusalem to flee across the Jordan river. It was a desperate time. The king did not know who was with him and who was against him, who would come to his side and who would fight against him. All he could do was flee and hope that he would have the time necessary to regroup and get organized. But would he?

The other important note in an introductory way that you should know is that this is probably a morning

psalm (note the language of verse 5). It is probably to be paired with Psalm 4, an evening prayer. But here David seems to be starting his day, aware of the precarious situation he is in and the need for God to help him.

Here is a brief outline we can use to break the psalm down as we study it.

I. Enemies are circling me, vv. 1-2

II. God is a circle of protection around me, vv. 3-6

III. God delivers, vv. 7-8

Enemies are circling me, vv. 1-2

Note carefully verse 2. Would any taunt of enemies so hurt David as this one? To charge that God was no longer with him would cut him to the quick. To be in the minority is always unnerving, but even more when that minority is shrinking! What will David do?

God is a circle of protection around me, vv. 3-6

Here is the real heart of the psalm. Watch as David moves his eyes from the enemy to God how the tone of the psalm changes. "If one gazes too long upon the enemy and his might, the enemy grows in the mind's eye to gigantic proportions . . . the hypnotic power of the enemy is broken when one turns one's gaze toward God."

Verse 3 describes the protection needed - a shield, glory and the lifting of the head. David needs a shield because he is now outside of Jerusalem. He claims then the glory of God as his glory, in other words, that serving God is all he desires to do, it is the only way he receives honor. What a statement! That is followed then by what may be the most beautiful line in the psalm: "the One who lifts up my head." When we get down and depressed our heads droop and we are (literally) downcast. But God would lift our heads up and fill us again with renewed courage and strength!

Verse 4 shows how desperate David is for protection, while verses 5-6 make remarkable statements of assurance. David is able to sleep, able to awake and able to have courage and confidence in God. Do those statements mark out how I deal with times of trouble?

God delivers me, vv. 7-8

The psalm ends on a note of supreme confidence, and ends by including all people, not just David. Remember, in the Jewish way of thinking victory could only come if God fought, because human strength was never enough. So David is calling upon God to win this battle for him.

Thinking through the Third Psalm

What points of application can we make as we consider this powerful psalm? First, I need to ask myself how powerful are my enemies compared to David's? This is not to deny that any of us are suffering or going through hard times, but it does give us perspective, doesn't it? None of us have experienced a family revolt, our own child trying to kill us and see the throne! See - it could be worse, and indeed, has been worse for others.

Secondly, can I turn things over to the Lord and sleep or am I paralyzed with anxiety? There is no doubt that we must do all we can in service to the Lord. We can't expect God to do it all while we do nothing. But when we've done all we can do, when all that is left is to trust in God, do we? How we sleep on those troubled nights may be a better measure of our faith than we might care for it to be! David gets out of Jerusalem, races across the Jordan and then, exhausted and worn-out, he has to camp for the night. This is all he can do. His people can go no further. He can do nothing else. What does he do then? He goes to bed! No pills, no sedatives, no anti-depressants. For David, prayer and trust sustain him, that is what he needs. Is that me, or can I truly let things go, let God take over?

How upset and worried is the Lord over our troubles? I ask that for two reasons. First, to point out forcefully, almost ludicrously, that nothing that bothers us has any power over the Lord. The armies Absalom marshaled were nothing before the power of God, and they were swept from the field without fanfare as the Lord fought for David. God's might and strength are awesome to behold and to see in action. We do well to remember this. But I also ask this question to assess what view of the Lord we have? When we cry to the Lord do we believe He hears and cares? David certainly does. Look at his confidence in vv. 7-8. David is involved personally with God. He is not some casual "Sunday-only" church-goer, someone who serves God just to make sure he doesn't get struck dead at any moment. David genuinely walked with God. His belief, therefore, was that if something is bothering me it will bother the God who made me, cares for me, and who I serve. Thus, I can talk to Him about that. Do you feel like David did? It may be that if we are not sleeping due to troubles that we lack faith here. It is not a lack of faith in prayer but a lack but a lack of faith in the God who will hear and answer prayer!

Finally, do we think that deliverance comes from us or the Lord? What does verse 8 mean to you? We emphasize human responsibility so much that I am afraid we may end up excluding all of God's activity. For some verse 8 means "salvation must come from me if it is going to come at all." Again, that is not to say there is no role for me to play, nothing for me to do. Absalom's rebellion provides a brilliant illustration of that, as David does much to insure the victory of his forces. But at the key moments, in the deciding second, it is the hand of God that brings all together favorably for David. Do we believe in that God? Or have we put God out of business with our concerns about Calvinism's extremes on this side and charismatic extremism on the other side? Let's not forget that God still works, in His times and in His ways, but He still works!

Conclusion

Is there any hope? When we begin the day so many troubles and problems rush up at us. We ask ourselves how will we make it? Psalm 3 calls us to pause for a moment to be aware of God's attention to our troubles, and that He protects us and answers our prayers. He gave us rest and He will give us life. 4 Psalm 3 calls on us to count on the Lord!

"All the water in the world, however hard it tried, could never, never sink a ship, unless it got inside. All the hardships of this world, might wear you pretty thin, but they won't hurt you one least bit, unless you let them in." May this psalm help you keep the world and its concerns out by filling your heart with God's love.

Endnotes:

1 Expositor's Bible Commentary, Psalms, page 72.

2 Craigie, Psalms, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 19, Waco, page 73.

3 Ibid page 74.

4 Ibid page 75.

By Mark Roberts
From Expository Files 8.9; September 2001

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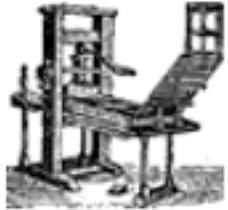
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Morning and Evening Prayers

Psalms 3 and 4

The Christian's monumental admonition concerning prayer was given by the apostle Paul as "pray without ceasing." Yet well over a thousand years before this, under the lesser light of revelation of the Old Testament, there was a man who lived the same teaching, King David. David was a living illustration of constant prayer. In this pair of psalms we have prayers for the morning and evening. First notice the confident prayer of the morning. This psalms begins with David's cries for help as he is surrounded by enemies who deride his trust in God.

3:1 O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me.
2 Many are saying of my soul, "There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah.
3 But Thou, O LORD, art a shield about me, My glory, and the One who lifts my head.
4 I was crying to the LORD with my voice, And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.

The enemies may ridicule; but God is still the shield, glory and power of David. Would that we could have such confidence in facing the world. How marvelous the answer of God from on high to the call of our prayers when they are made with such faith.

5 I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.
6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me round about.
7 Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God! For Thou hast smitten all my enemies on the cheek; Thou hast shattered the teeth of the wicked.
8 Salvation belongs to the LORD; Thy blessing be upon Thy people! Selah.

Because of this David could rest at night knowing that the Lord would sustain him and still be with him in the morning. The answering of prayers past gives David confidence in facing whatever comes later. Even if it be ten thousands against David, numbers do not determine the question of right, nor do they determine the question of success. And numbers certainly don't determine the question of happiness. For David was far more at ease in his conscience than his much more numerous enemies. This is because God has brought, is bringing, and will bring salvation. What a wonderful thought to begin the day with. Reading on, we learn that David's day not only began with calling on God, but ended that way also.

4:1 Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! Thou hast relieved me in my distress; Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.
2 O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? Selah.

Verse 1 is a great mixture of two thoughts -- the request for God to answer prayers and acknowledgement that God has answered them. But men do not consider these things. They long for the vain things of this earth. They could have the blessings of and confidence in God, but they take the passing pleasures of sin, the vanity of physical possessions, and the fleeting fame in the approval of men. Oh that men would seek the spiritual as the they do the carnal.

3 But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself; The LORD hears when I call to Him.

4 Tremble, and do not sin; Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

The real progress that one makes is life is made in God. The righteous has built his house on the Lord and the Lord builds his house. Compare this to the activity of the world: the mocking of the mockers, the scoffing of the scoffers, the sinning of the sinners, etc. It all continues unabated around the clock. The roaring cacophony of worldly noise never ceases. But when David went to bed he was not troubled by any of their hubbub. He went to sleep in quietness of heart. In the previous psalm we might have wondered how David was able to start the day with such a refreshed mind in light of all the that surrounded Him. Here is the answer - he slept well the night before in the peace that only faith in God can bring.

5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And trust in the LORD.

6 Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?" Lift up the light of Thy countenance upon us, O LORD!

7 Thou hast put gladness in my heart, More than when their grain and new wine abound.

8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For Thou alone, O LORD, dost make me to dwell in safety. Worship God. Trust God. See the goodness that He brings His people -- and peacefully and prayerfully go to sleep each night.

Be quieted in heart for God rules all. He is approachable in prayer. He has delivered us many times in the past. And the peace of God is upon His people. As Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." (Jn. 14:27)

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 7.7; July 2000

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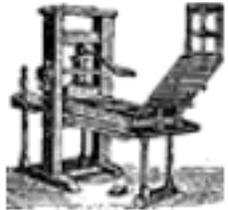
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Psalm 8 – The Emotions of the Poet

“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth...”

There are at least two songs I’m aware of, built around this statement of praise. One is #90 Hymns for Worship, Revised. There is another rendition in Great Songs of the Church, #562, by Horatio Palmer (1874). It is also published in Alton Howard’s Sons of Faith and Praise, number 215. Thanks to my nephew, Jeremy Boyd, for this research. He is the “go to” guy for this kind of research.)

In the 8th Psalm, there is very simple structure. David’s offers up this statement of praise, then immediately tells us why God is worthy of such praise:

He has “set” His “glory above the heavens.”

He has “ordained strength.”

He has silenced the enemy and the avenger.

Next, David takes us further into the excellence of God (vss. 3-5). David is so overwhelmed as he contemplates the creative work of God, he expresses his astonishment over God’s attention to man: “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” The point of this is not to downgrade man. This is a poetic and emotional expression of his astonishment of the vastness of the divine-made universe.

Note this intriguing thing about Hebrew poetry that English-speaking people may not be familiar with: David visit two things side by side, that seem contradictory: the insignificance of man – but God’s mindfulness of man. This is what happens when the heart of man tries to take in all God has made. One is so overwhelmed, it may be difficult to state in academic, objective terms.

Keep in the forefront, the theme: The excellence of God. Like a good preacher, David ends where he started: “O Lord, O Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth.” I need to make that more of a part of my personal devotion. How about you?

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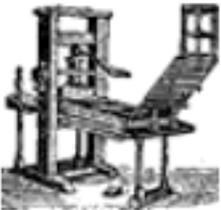
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What on Earth is Going On?

Psalm 9

On December 21, 1988 Pan Am flight 103 was bombed out of the air, killing all 259 people on board and 11 more on the ground. The little Scottish town of Lockerbie was instantly linked forever to this horrible act of international terrorism. More than twelve years later an international court finally sentenced Abdelbasset Megrahi to life in prison for his part in the bombing. Yet as satisfying as that verdict might have been the real culprit, the rogue government of Libya, remains largely unpunished. It is hard to see pictures of an airliner strewn across a dozen miles of Scotland and families burying innocent loved ones without wondering "Lord, what on earth is going on?" That is precisely what the ninth psalm deals with. The psalmist isn't interested in talking about one bad man here or there that is prospering while in iniquity. In this psalm he wants to probe how God's rule of righteousness and the kingdoms of men come into play. Psalm 9 asks the hard questions: "God, do you know what is happening down here? Will you help us? Will right eventually triumph or will evil nations and evil governments overwhelm Your people?" If you are interested in those kinds of questions come along as we study the ninth psalm!

Introductory Matters

One of the most important interpretive issues with the ninth psalm is a question about the tenth psalm: do they go together? Both of these psalms are acrostic psalms. That means that each line or stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in alphabetical sequence. Psalm 9 covers the first eleven letters of the Hebrew alphabet (though one letter is missing in the pattern), roughly equivalent to our letters A through K. Psalm 10 then picks up that acrostic pattern where, perhaps, Psalm 9 leaves it off. Some old manuscripts even put them together as one psalm, and they do share some distinctive vocabulary. Are they one psalm? Probably not. These two psalms each has its own distinctive theme. Psalm 10 deals with a wicked man, and seems very much to be an individual crying to God about the prosperity of the wicked (see 10:5). Psalm 9 is different. It is much more community oriented, involving everyone in the praise of God for how He deals with nations and kingdoms. So it seems best to see them as related in ways, but not to be taken together. Of course, coming from the same author we would expect style and vocabulary similarities but again, they do not seem to be one psalm.

A key in understanding any psalm is to know its type. This is a lament psalm (a psalm crying for divine help). The superscription lists David as the author, and without any other contrary evidence it seems best to accept that. The notes in the superscription are very difficult to translate and ideas vary wildly as to exactly what they mean. The phrase given as "To the tune of 'Death of the Son'" (NKJV) remains a puzzle.

A simple outline for this psalm would be as follows:

[Individual praise of God, vv. 1-2](#)

[God's judgment on enemies, vv. 3-6](#)

[Hope in God's just rule, vv. 7-10](#)

[Community praise of God, vv. 11-14](#)

[God's judgment on nations, vv. 15-18](#)

[Hope in God's just rule, vv. 19-20](#)

Watch the symmetry of this psalm powerfully reinforce the idea that God rules in the affairs of men!

[1. Individual praise of God, vv. 1-2](#)

The psalmist is in trouble so he begins with a statement of praise. Note the four "I will" lines. When you are in trouble can you say what David says? I will worship whole-heartedly. I will tell others of God's work. I will be glad. I will praise God. The praise of God not only causes us to forget our troubles but it deepens our confidence in God. When we find ourselves concerned with evil in this world these verses are a great place for people of faith to begin their cry to God!

[2. God's judgment on enemies, vv. 3-6](#)

David praises God for His work of vanquishing evil nations. David realizes God is at work. He is bringing down ungodliness. He is routing His enemies. Sometimes we miss this work of God because we are so rooted in the present, in the now. Focus your attention on verse 5: "blotted out their name." The psalmist isn't kidding. Remember the regular refrain in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers about the "Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite" (see Exo. 33:2)? Where are those nations today? Do you know what is known about the Perizzite and Hivite nations? Practically nothing. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says, of the Hivites, "No name resembling Hivite has yet been found in the Egyptian and Babylonian inscriptions."ⁱⁱ Once these were great nations, feared by many, ruling and reigning with might and strength. Now they are gone. They opposed God and His ways and their names have been "blotted out" forever. David wants us to know: those nations that perpetrate evil and ignore God will know His judgment. If the world stands long enough you can be sure that the names Nazi Germany and Communist China and the Soviet Union likewise will dissolve into history and be forgotten. Why? Because God, in His time and in His ways, is pulling down those powers that oppose Him.

[3. Hope in God's just rule, vv. 7-10](#)

Verse seven is the heart of the psalm. In contrast to evil nations that are being destroyed "the Lord shall endure forever." The ground of all hope is that the Lord rules. Don't miss the beautiful language of verse 10. To know God's name is to know God. "Name" here stands for the total Person, and means to know His character, His likes, His dislikes, His desires and more. Those who know the Lord know they can trust the Lord for He still rules!

[4. Community praise of God, vv. 11-14](#)

All who dwell in Zion are called to sing praises to God. This kind of language is very common in lament psalms. David here urges God to save him, not for David's comfort, but because by so doing more will

hear of God's work and be urged to praise the Lord (verse 14).

5. God's judgment on the nations, vv. 15-18

Again, the psalmist reiterates the idea of God tearing down evil nations. Interestingly, verse fifteen views that as something the nations do to themselves. They are caught up in their own sin. Their own transgressions "boomerang" on them and destroy them. This is the nature of sin and wickedness. Not only does it have a terrible eternal reward, but even in this life it turns back on the sinner to bite him and make his life hard and miserable. The other point that needs to be seen in this section is how victory over evil governments is viewed as an accomplished fact. "The wicked is snared . . . the wicked shall be turned into hell . . . the needy shall not always be forgotten." The psalmist sees God presently at work, and that work goes on into the future. This is true trust in God. The one who knows God rules will look upon wickedness and say "That can't last. I won't join with that because I know is defeating that and will defeat that. Things can't continue as they are because God is at work and evil will be judged." How can we be sure? Verse 16: "The Lord is known by the judgment He executes." God's name and reputation are at stake here! God must destroy evil to vindicate His own righteousness.

6. Hope in God's just rule, vv. 19-20

The psalmist closes by setting before us the issues of God's justice and faithfulness. If He does not judge the nations around will never realize who is God. God will act and must act to establish His name before all!

Conclusions

This psalm gives the child of God confidence in God's just rule. Sometimes we look only to eternity as the time when all will be set right. Psalm 9 helps us see clearly that even in the here and now God seeks to establish righteousness and justice. What in the world is going on? God is defeating His enemies. God is protecting His people. God is establishing His rule. That may not always come as swiftly as I might desire, or even in my lifetime. But I know God's name and so I must put my trust in God. "The Lord will endure forever!"

End Notes

1. Adapted from Expositor's Bible Commentary, Psalms, pages 116-117.
2. Taken from ISBE on the QuickVerse ver. 6 CD-ROM.

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The Insincerity of Men, The Sincerity of God

Psalm 12

The Psalms are a good place to learn more about both God and man. The writers used various elements of Hebrew poetry to describe God, praise Him, complain to Him, ask for relief and make promises to Him. As we read these we are put in good position to learn more of our Creator, and what our response to Him ought to be. Too, the psalms contain rare insights into humanity: the origin of man, the needs of man, the guilt of sin we earn by wrong choices, and the consequences. Importantly, the Psalms convey helpful direction, leading us to the Messiah, in whom we can enjoy redemption. We can be trained and guided further into the truth about both God and man when we read and study the Psalms.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
And the tongue that speaks proud things,
Who have said,
"With our tongue we will prevail;
Our lips are our own;
Who is lord over us?"
"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise," says the LORD;
"I will set him in the safety for which he yearns."
The words of the LORD are pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.
The wicked prowl on every side,
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

The passage begins with a statement of lamentation, an expression of grief: "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men." The writer is revealing an emotion.

At least at the moment he wrote this, he loses sight of any remnant. His concern is, Where are all the faithful people? Have they died? Have they ceased the activity of faith? Where are they? This is like a similar expression of sorrow written by Micah. "The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net," (Micah 7:2). Now it may be argued, this is arousing embellishment or "poetic hyperbole." Nevertheless, it is the genuine emotion of godly people, as they become aware that their number and their way of life lies in demise.

I think God's people today must feel this way, and at times the emotion may be this deeply felt. If we are God's people, we place great value on behavior expressive of honesty, personal purity, modesty, generosity, prayer, following the Scriptures, etc. But in our time we see these things either perverted, debated or ignored. And, as verse 8 declares: "vileness is exalted among the sons of men." We often see what Isaiah saw (Isa. 59:4-9), or we observe the repulsive behaviors Paul documented in Romans one. We are led by the sight of sin to complain that the faithful fail, the godly cease. Every child of God lives with the sad knowledge of the absence of godliness all around us.

The author defines what he saw that caused his grief: "They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?'" Likewise in verse 8: "The wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men." What people say reveals who they are, because the tongue is governed by the heart (Matt. 12:34). The writer of Psalms 12 drew the conclusion, "the godly man ceases," because he heard how people were talking - their conversation revealed their character. Our talk reveals our heart (see also Jas. 1:26). Falsehood uttered reveals falsehood within. Idle talk says the heart is idle. Boasting proves pride. And notice the claim of verbal victory and self-rule: "...We will prevail, who is lord over us?" The lamentation of verse 1 was justified by the speech and behavior described in verses 2-4 and 8.

In verse 5, God replies to the complaint of the faithful. He says, "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise." This is a reference to God's promise to give relief to the victims of the sinful behavior defined. God has never overlooked any real victim! He doesn't check us with, as to when and how to react. We cannot dictate to God, set deadlines or demand that He use the methods we think best. But you cannot give the Bible a fair hearing and miss this truth. He comes to the rescue of those who are victims of the treachery of man. {In the gospel, there is the supreme evidence of God's desire to deliver, even victims of their own sin! Rom. 5:6-8}. God responds to the writer's call for help. He states His intent to arise and deliver the victims to safety.

If verse 5 is God's promise to arise and help, verses 6 & 7 state the basis of our confidence in God's word. "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, you shall preserve them from this generation forever." Now we arrive at the point or theme I want to stress. Carefully observe the contrast between what men say and what God says! In this chapter, men speak idly, "with flattering lips and double heart." Men use their tongues to exalt themselves, gain their vile purpose and thus reveal their evil purpose of heart. It was so bad, the writer said, "the faithful disappear from among the sons of men."

But now, turn your attention from the vain talk of men to the words of the Lord. "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." You cannot place confidence in the idle talk of men. You cannot reply upon the promises of the proud; "with flattering lips and a double heart they speak." But there is good reason for unwavering confidence in God and in what God says.

In those days metal was tried and purified with fire. A furnace would be dug in the earth, an intense fire built, to test and purify silver. The process was repeated until there was no doubt, the product was genuine silver. The point of the illustration is, the words of the Lord are "perfectly pure." No falsehood mixed in; no empty flatter; no false promises; no guile or deception in even trace amounts! "The words of the Lord are pure words."

So, in regard to the Lord's promise to arise and rescue victims of man's treachery, there is the greatest confidence. "You shall keep them, O Lord, you shall preserve them from this generation forever." The writer was sure God would save the victims, setting them in the safety for which they yearned.

Psalms 12 establishes the insincerity of man and the sincerity of God! When Paul wrote so fully to document the sin of man he quoted from the Psalms: "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit," (Rom. 3:13). This is the insincerity of man. This is why, you cannot just follow where men may lead, without discernment. We must not blindly accept the religious teachings and practices of men. We cannot allow men to impose upon us their standards and creeds (whether the men are baptized or not). There are false teachers who by smooth words and flattering speech, deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:18).

What we can do is, repose our souls in the hands of God. Everything is just exactly as God represents it. He "cannot lie," (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). We can enjoy great and absolute consolation in the words of God. His promises can bring into our hearts, a real assurance that men try to imitate but cannot duplicate. The Word of God has no other purpose, no other design upon us, than to do us the highest eternal good. Psalm 12 marks the difference between the insincerity of man and the absolute sincerity of God. The sum total of divine truth was given for our good, but requires our response.

"What a contrast between the vain words of man, and the pure words of Jehovah. Man's words are yea and nay, but the Lord's promises are yea and amen. For truth, certainty, holiness, faithfulness, the words of the Lord are pure as well refined silver. In the original there is an allusion to the most severely purifying process known to the ancients, through which silver was passed when the greatest possible purity was desired; the dross was all consumed, and only the bright and precious metal remained; so clear and free from all alloy of error or unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord. The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy to precious ore. The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat."

{Spurgeon, Charles H. "Commentary on Psalms 12:6". "The Treasury of David" }

By Warren E Berkley
From Expository Files 9.10; October 2002

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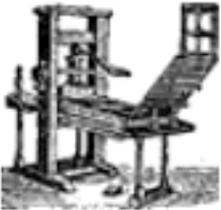
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Imprecatory Prayer

Psalm 35

The title of this article may be a bit confusing to you. In the past it was confusing to me as well. We study a lot about prayer, and hopefully do it even more often, yet how often do we make an "imprecatory" one? In fact, what is an imprecatory prayer? This word isn't even in my standard dictionary, so I had to look it up in the unabridged one. There I found this simple entry for imprecatory: "uttering an imprecation." That didn't help much, so I looked up "imprecation" and it all became clear. It is the "invoking of evil, a curse." Now you might think that this is the very opposite of what we should pray for, yet under very special circumstances we find the righteous engaged in it. There are some cases where a curse is the appropriate thing. God cursed Israel (and many others) for their continued evil, and there are desperate times when we may actually be moved pray for this to happen.

Ps. 35 is the great imprecatory prayer of a righteous man in the Old Testament. David prayed for deliverance because he was surrounded by implacable enemies. David knew that he could not win this fight alone. He needed the help of God, so he asked for it.

1 Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; Fight against those who fight against me.

2 Take hold of buckler and shield, And rise up for my help.

3 Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me; Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

David calls on the Lord to take up the struggle for him. The first rule of a righteous imprecatory prayer is that it be offered in a situation where you can rightfully call on God to fight for you. The righteous imprecatory prayer can only be for a righteous cause.

Second, the righteous imprecatory prayer (not just an evil wishing of injury) is uttered by one in danger of grievous harm, even destruction.

4 Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life; Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me.

7 For without cause they hid their net for me; Without cause they dug a pit for my soul.

11 Malicious witnesses rise up; They ask me of things that I do not know.

12 They repay me evil for good, To the bereavement of my soul.

15 But at my stumbling they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; The smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me, They slandered me without ceasing.

16 Like godless jesters at a feast, They gnashed at me with their teeth.

20 For they do not speak peace, But they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.

This is not to be the appeal of one who is just annoyed or bothered. This is a person suffering greatly at the hands of evil men.

David was faced with cruel and unrelenting enemies he could not stop. Since David could not stop them, he prayed for God to do it.

5 Let them be like chaff before the wind, With the angel of the LORD driving them on.

6 Let their way be dark and slippery, With the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

8 Let destruction come upon him unawares; And let the net which he hid catch himself; Into that very destruction let him fall.

David knew the character of those who so vehemently opposes him. He knew the only way they would stop was to be made to stop by force. But such force is often beyond the strength of men. Even the most powerful have limits on what they can do. And often this type of prayer will be said by those who have no power at all.

So the situation in which to offer a righteous imprecatory prayer is 1) when it is a cause that God will support, 2) you are suffering a terrible harm and 3) other means of relief are not available. These are not simply prayers of vengeance, but prayers of dependence on God as the only hope of help. Keeping these things in mind, let us examine the character of the man who can offer such a prayer righteously.

While calling on the Lord to help, David, like all of us, had to exhibit patience. Patience in waiting on the Lord is an essential element of any prayer, but we can especially see the need when waiting on the Lord to avenge us.

17 Lord, how long wilt Thou look on? Rescue my soul from their ravages, My only life from the lions.

22 Thou hast seen it, O LORD, do not keep silent; O Lord, do not be far from me.

23 Stir up Thyself, and awake to my right, And to my cause, my God and my Lord.

While some would object that it is not patience at all to pray to God for the destruction of their enemies, that idea is simply wrong. If destruction is truly warranted and is the will of God, to pray for it is neither impatient nor wrong. Taking individual vengeance is both wrong and impatient. Rom. 12:19 "Never take

your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord." Not taking one's own vengeance, but waiting on God to use His tools (natural means, governments, other evil men's predilection for evil, etc.) to bring His vengeance is exactly what patience is.

Also, anyone who would plead for God to relieve him from the evil of his enemies must truly make sure that his enemy can not rightly ask for the same relief because of the pleader's action. The righteous imprecatory prayer is a tool for the innocent only.

14 I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.

15 But at my stumbling they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; The smites whom I did not know gathered together against me, They slandered me without ceasing.

24 Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Thy righteousness; And do not let them rejoice over me.

This type of prayer is not for those who are involved in mutual recriminations. David pleads his innocence of any wrong doing that would bring on this kind of hatred. Of course David sinned as all men do, but in his relations with these evil men, who opposed him relentlessly, he was innocent.

Finally, the one who would offer the imprecatory prayer needs to do so not with a vengeful and hateful heart, but rejoicing in the Lord. This type of prayer is not simply from a desire to harm others, but to have the Lord help stop their evil. When this happens, the joy that we have in the Lord is greatly refreshed.

9 And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD; It shall exult in His salvation.

10 All my bones will say, "LORD, who is like Thee, Who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him, And the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?"

18 I will give Thee thanks in the great congregation; I will praise Thee among a mighty throng.

28 And my tongue shall declare Thy righteousness And Thy praise all day long.

When any prayer is answered we have joy, but when the answer stops the attacks of the enemy our praise should be unceasing, or as David said, "praise all day long."

We hope that we never need to pray for the Lord to punish evildoers who are harming us, but sometimes that is the only way to find relief. Righteous imprecatory prayer is the last hope of the patient, innocent, faithful saint.

Use of this type of prayer may not be a pleasant thought, but the grave sin of evil men spoils many things. Imprecatory prayer is one of the helps God extends to us in times of such need.

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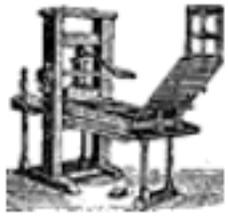
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For What Am I Waiting?

(Psalm 39)

Waiting is part of life. Some businesses have thrived on reducing wait time. That is the purpose behind drive through lanes at the bank and at fast food restaurants. That is why there are so many checkout lanes at the grocery store. But, inevitably, we still find ourselves waiting in lines and waiting rooms. Waiting is sometimes necessary: The farmer waits for his crops to mature. The batter waits for his pitch. The runner waits for the starting pistol.

But waiting is sometimes dangerous. Many illnesses can be treated if caught soon enough. A person who is flailing about in the water is not interested in being asked to "wait a minute" before being tossed a rope. Spiritual minded people would think of the danger of waiting to obey the gospel or teaching the lost about Jesus.

Why do so many wait to make things right with God? Why not follow Him today? Why put off things we know need doing? Many times we fail to act because spiritually we are unprepared; we are too distant from God. But such neglect is a dangerous thing; the opportunities to save ourselves and others slip away (1 Timothy 4:15,16).

Consider the Psalmist David who, because of his own sin and estrangement from God, for a time could no longer speak for the Lord (he was ashamed to teach righteousness when he himself had been so negligent). Listen to him: "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You." (Psalm 39:7). That is a good question. When it comes to being what the Lord wants me to be, then what am I waiting for? Consider the thirty-ninth Psalm.

Waiting to Speak

I said, "I will guard my ways
That I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle
While the wicked are in my presence."
I was mute and silent, I refrained even from good,
And my sorrow grew worse.
My heart was hot within me,
While I was musing the fire burned;
Then I spoke with my tongue:
(Psalm 39:1-3).

Sin and neglect makes it awkward for us to communicate any spiritual truth to others. We are commanded to tell others of Jesus; to encourage obedience to His gospel and to teach against sin. We are told to have the proper spirit and attitude as we do so (Ephesians 5:11; Titus 3:8; Galatians 6:1,2). But we cannot help others see their need to repent of wrong if we refuse to do so ourselves (Matthew 7:1-5).

The Psalmist also tells us that to continue in neglect and sin only makes matters worse (vs. 2). The Psalmist David's "sorrow" and inner "pain" grew worse. His sin had many bad effects, both temporal as well as spiritual (Romans 7:24; 1 Timothy 6:9,10). David saw clearly opportunities and the need to speak (vs. 3). He was so eager to speak to the need of the moment (like Jeremiah; Jeremiah 20:9). God expects you to be prepared to obey Him and speak His will as well (Acts 4:19,20). "And now Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in Thee".

Time Does Not Wait For Us To Act

LORD, make me to know my end
And what is the extent of my days;
Let me know how transient I am.
Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths,
And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath.
Selah.
Surely every man walks about as a phantom;
Surely they make an uproar for nothing;
He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.
(Psalm 39:4-6)

Life goes on. It would be nice if we could call "timeout" and life would just stop while we attended to our business, and then when we were ready to take care of the Lord's business; we could start the clock up again. Like Jesus, we need to be "about our Father's business" (Luke 2:49; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Joshua 24:14-15).

It is possible to wait too long. There is not always tomorrow. Paul was brought before the governor Festus and King Agrippa. Festus never seemed to be all that close to heeding the gospel, but Paul's preaching "almost persuaded" Agrippa to become a Christian. But think: how much better off in eternity is Agrippa than Festus? He is no better off! Being "close" to acting is not enough (Acts 26:24-29).

The Scripture often warns against assuming that "there is always a tomorrow" (Luke 12:19-21; James 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Hopelessly Waiting

And now, Lord, for what do I wait?
My hope is in You.
(Psalm 39:7)

Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry;
Do not be silent at my tears;
For I am a stranger with You,
A sojourner like all my fathers.
Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again
Before I depart and am no more.
(Psalm 39:12-13).

The time to prepare is now. A day without the Lord is a day without hope. (Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:12; Hebrews 3:12,13). There is no good reason to end this day without God. The Bible encourages speedy action on those who know what the right thing to do is. Today is the day to make preparation and take action (Hebrews 4:6-7; 2 Corinthians 6:1-3). David said; "For I am a stranger with You" (vs. 12). Don't allow the Lord to become a stranger to you! (Matthew 7:21-23).

Pain and sorrow is not always a bad thing. It woke David up as to his soul's true needs. It caused him to ask, "And now Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in Thee."

It would have been foolish for David to have waited further. It would have been wasteful and could have had made tragic circumstances even worse.

Deliver me from all my transgressions;
Make me not the reproach of the foolish.
I have become mute, I do not open my mouth,
Because it is You who have done it.
Remove Your plague from me;
Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing.
(Psalm 39:8-10).

Like David's, our hope is also in the Lord. Like David, it is foolish for us to wait as well. There is too much at stake. It cannot be worth it. The consequences for neglect are too steep; and the reward for seeking God in righteousness are too wondrous. Our hope is in the Lord.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 11.4, April, 2004

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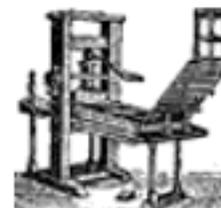


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A Mighty Fortress

Psalm 46

On a recent trip to Charleston, South Carolina I stood on the walls of Fort Sumter and tried to imagine the bombardment which took place on this sight over a hundred years earlier. A small contingent of men under the leadership of Major Robert Anderson disguised themselves as workmen in order to get past a Southern guard boat as they made their way to the island fortress in Charleston Harbor. The ruse worked and Anderson and some 65 men occupied the vacant fort in the twilight of a December evening.

For the next four months, while the nation moved inevitably towards war, Anderson's men prepared the fort's defenses. At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, a 10-inch mortar belching flame and smoke sent a round shell arching across the water exploding over Fort Sumter illuminating the brick fortification in the darkness and signaling the beginning of the bombardment and of the bloody war between the states. The bombardment lasted for 34 hours and although over 3000 shells were fired on the fort, not a single man lost his life. Anderson ultimately surrendered the fort because provisions for his men ran out, not because the fortress failed to withstand the assault.

During the final two years of the war the fort, now under the command of Confederate troops, weathered 11 bombardments by Union forces. The total number of rounds fired against the fort exceeded 43,000. Although the brick walls of the fort were pounded to rubble, Union attempts failed to force its surrender. The South abandoned the fort when Sherman and his troops approached the city of Charleston. The fort never failed to provide safety for those who remained within its walls.

The sons of Korah proclaimed God as their "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psa. 46:1). History records the 46th psalm as a favorite of Martin Luther. During the turmoil of the Reformation the psalm inspired his hymn, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott." Today we sing Frederick Hedge's translation of Luther's hymn.

*A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.*

"God is our refuge and strength; our helper in troubles which often befall us" (Psa. 46:1; LXX). There are many troubles which plague man in this life. These troubles can do us no permanent harm if we seek

refuge within that never failing bulwark. Sin, our own and other's, and its consequences make calamity and the threat of calamity a reality in our lives. It troubled us when we heard about the bombing in Oklahoma City and the gassing of innocent people in a Japanese subway. These events heighten our awareness of the precarious nature of life on this planet and they produce anxiety for many. These foul deeds make us wonder, "Who is safe?" There are constant threats to our security. Political leaders propose new legislation to "beef-up" security, but we realize that new laws and increased security will not provide absolute security from evil men.

Jesus warned, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

[The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still.](#)

A greater threat to man than the threat to his physical body is the threat of sin to his soul and its eternal consequences.

[For still our ancient foe dost seek to work us woe. His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate. On earth is not his equal.](#)

We now have the final body count from Oklahoma City. How many would we assign to the "soul count" if we counted Satan's victims worldwide just on the day of the explosion?

True security can only be found in the refuge and strength of God. We covet the extreme confidence expressed in the 46th psalm, "we will not fear." Complete trust in God casts out all anxiety. The vicissitudes of our earthly existence and spiritual struggle are not sufficient to overcome us if God is our refuge and strength.

"Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling" (Psa 46:2-3). "The city of God" (46:4), is the place of refuge. It is a refuge because there is a "river"

there whose streams make it glad, and God is in her midst. Do we appreciate the picture God paints for us here, which contrasts the waters that roar and that are troubled in the world, and the river and its streams which make the city glad? There is no turmoil, anxiety, upheaval in the city because God is there. When we abide

there, we enjoy the protection from the raging, shaking, roaring, swelling, and moving that constantly threaten and cause anxiety for those who do not dwell in the city. This refuge gives strong consolation or encouragement for those who have fled to it (Heb. 6:18). Paul shared this confidence with the sons of Korah because he had learned "whatever state I am in to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:11-13). God's presence, "the Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5) and His peace, "which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:6, 7), gives us confidence so that we can "be anxious for nothing."

Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing;
were not the right One on our side the Man of God's own choosing.

"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:7). Here we have the identification of God and His relationship with His people. The expression "Lord of hosts," defines God's power and dominion. His authority extends to all creation. The Lord is Omnipotent.

The expression "Lord of hosts" appears twice in the New Testament in its transliterated form, "Lord of Sabaoth." Paul, quoting from Isaiah, wrote, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah" (Rom. 9:29). James revealed, "...the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (Js. 5:4). In both cases the child of God finds comfort because God does not abandon those who trust in Him. "If God is for us who can be against us" (Rom. 8:31)?

The identification "God of Jacob" has reference to the promises made to Jacob and his fathers before him; Abraham and Isaac. In Jacob's dream he saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. The Lord appeared above and told Jacob among other things that "in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 28:12-14).

When we dwell with God we are promised provision and protection. He has provided the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. He protects us from ultimate harm promising us an eternal oasis free from the cares and concerns of this life. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Fort Sumter withstood bombardment and supplied its troops with protection as long as they remained within its walls. Its failure came in its inability to provide for all of the men's needs. Our God is a Mighty Fortress, Who never fails to protect and provide as long as we stay within its mighty walls. "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

By Karl Hennecke
From Expository Files 2.6; June, 1995

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The Rock that is Higher Than I

Psalm 61:2

"From the end of the earth will I call unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," Psa. 61:2.

We should think often of the Rock of our Salvation. Our Savior is Jesus. In what ways is Jesus "higher than I"?

1. **When we consider the deity of Christ, he is "higher than I."** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made" (John 1:1-3). Jesus Christ is not just a man, though He was fully man. But, Jesus is God: "for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17). No such thing could ever be said of a mere man. The Hebrew writer called Him God when he wrote: "but of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever . . . And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands . . .," (1:8,10). Truly, Jesus, the Rock of my salvation, is "higher than I" because of His deity.

2. **Jesus is "higher than I" in knowledge.** The inspired apostle Paul writes of Him that "in Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Colossians 2:3). Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah: "And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah" (Isaiah 11:2). Jesus knows much more than I can ever know. Jesus knows everything, even what other men are thinking: "But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25). Yes, Jesus is above me in knowledge.

3. **Jesus is "higher than I" in power.** Fact of the matter is, He has all power. "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). I can't say that, can you? The New Testament teaches that Jesus' power is so complete that "he is able even to subject all things unto himself" (Philippians 3:21), "for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

4. Jesus is "higher than I" in that He is equal with the Father. Jesus said to the Jews of His time that God "hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him" (John 5:22-23). Clearly, Jesus was claiming to be equal with the Father. Paul said that Jesus was equal with the Father and that "existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:6-7). I never have been on an equality with God, have you?

5. Jesus is "higher than I" in that He is an object of men's faith and worthy of worship. Peter affirmed of Him, "And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6:69). The Hebrew writer said of Him, "And when he again bringeth in the firstborn into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Hebrews 1:6). Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The angels certainly do not worship me, nor am I the object of other men's faith for their salvation.

6. Jesus Christ is "higher than I" in that He is the only way to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Peter and John told people that "He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). I am not the way by which men come to God, are you?

Yes, truly, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!

Scanned from Christianity Magazine June 1992

By Brent Lewis
From Expository Files 2.8; August, 1995

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They Will Still Yield Fruit in Old Age

Psalm 71

"I don't know... I just do not feel like I am a part of the congregation anymore." This statement, or something very similar to it, has been made to me on more than one occasion in different churches by different brethren whom I love and respect very much. In each case, it surprised me because each had done so much to advance the cause of Christ in times past. None of them were perfect, but they each had done what they could.

So, why had this feeling developed? Well, they all had one thing in common that had led them to this conclusion. They were advanced in years. Frailties and responsibilities were weighing heavily upon them, and they were not as directly active in the efforts of the local churches where they were members as they had once been.

First, this is not a feeling exclusively found in the realm of the local church and participation in the efforts there. Even non religious older folks many times feel the same way concerning whatever realms they may have once been more active in.

But life brings changes. God knew it would be this way, and He has something to say about it. We cannot do better than to see what the Lord has to say.

Not All of Us Are Like Moses

"Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated. (Deuteronomy 34:7). Moses was an exception to the rule, and that is why this Biblical statement was noteworthy. We'd all like to be physically healthy as Moses was in our advanced years.

But typically, we more often fit the description of the writer of Ecclesiastes. After, in a rather mournful poetic way he described failing eyesight and losing ones teeth, he urges us to remember always the Lord; "Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Eccl 12:6-7; see vss 1-7).

An Aged Psalmist Writes

Though we may not have Moses' vigor, we can still have his faith. There is an interesting Psalm written by an elderly man of faith. It shows us several things about a man of strong faith as he deals with life's

issues and struggles in his advanced age. Without repeating the whole Psalm here, note a few lines from it.

First, what this gentleman does have is God as his refuge and fortress. Every man and woman of faith at whatever age always has this! "In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed. In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; Incline Your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress. (Psalm 71:1-3).

But this wonderful assurance does not mean that there are no ordeals to overcome. Some are related to age, some are not. For example, then as now, there are people who would trick and con the elderly. The Psalmist writes, "Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man," (Psalm 71:4).

Others watch and were amazed at how this grey-headed (later in the Psalm we learn of his hair color) man of faith deals with life's issues with a strength and grace that are his because of his faith in God. He will not stop declaring his confidence, peace and joy. "I have become a marvel to many, For You are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with Your praise And with Your glory all day long." (Psalm 71:7-8).

After speaking of how God had been with him from birth, the Psalmist speaks of his continued need for God in the evening of life. He pleads for God's continued presence, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails." (Psalm 71:9).

The Psalmist sees his advancement in age as continued opportunity to show others God's strength, though perhaps in different circumstances than he did when he was a young man "O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come." (Psalm 71:17-18).

And finally, the Palmist sees ultimate revival and victory in spite of the problems he faces in his final time on the earth. "You who have shown me many troubles and distresses. Will revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth. May You increase my greatness And turn to comfort me." (Psalm 71:20-21).

Some Things the Lord Has Said

The Lord urges respect for the elderly. This needs to include self respect for those who are advanced in years. Concerning the righteous elderly, the Lord speaks of their usefulness in His service, "They will still yield fruit in old age... to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." (See Psalm 92:12-15). For those who have lived their lives in righteous service of the Lord, the Bible says, "A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness." (Proverbs 16:31).

Services to be Rendered

So, what can one do? The first thing to remember is that in the local church there are many different things to do by different people with different abilities and opportunities. Not everyone is young or old (hopefully) but there are things for everyone to do as they are able. No one ought to feel that they are any less a part of the body due to the inability to do everything they would like to be able to do (1 Corinthians 12:13-27). So, what can an elderly disciple do who is now infirmed or otherwise incapacitated due to the restraints of age?

Be good examples. When outward strength fades, show inner, spiritual strength and let it increase. "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16). Be the cause of others "marveling" because of your grace and inner strength and confidence. When Paul was aged, he did this from a prison (Philemon 9)!

Give counsel with Scriptures and proven experience. As you are able, speak of the blessings and victories that God has given you (Titus 2:2-4).

Pray. Anna was 84 and prayed "night and day" (Luke 2:37). Age does not diminish the effectiveness of the prayers of righteous men and women (James 5:16b). Pray for the church, the elders, the teachers, the preacher, the sick, the lost, the young, the old.

Do not let anyone diminish the importance of these three areas of service. And these are not exhaustive, you can perhaps think of many more. The church needs all these services, and those who involve themselves in these things are rendering wonderful service to God and His church and a blessing to their fellow members in the body.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 12.8; August 2005

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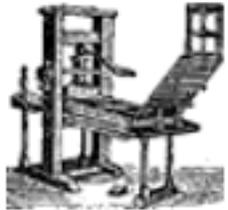
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Give Thanks For The Judgment

Psalm 75

This is one of four psalms that are according to, or set to, "Al-tashheth." This word means "do not destroy." Three other psalms (Ps. 57, 58, and 59) are also formed in this way. The best conjecture as to the meaning of this is that these are psalms or warning to the enemies of God not to become too proud in their own power because it is God's people that they are going up against.

1 (For the choir director; set to Al-tashheth. A Psalm of Asaph, a Song.) We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks, For Thy name is near; Men declare Thy wondrous works.

We should praise God again and again. Partial gratitude on our part is in fact ingratitude. We praise God who is wondrous and mighty in works. He is not asleep as we suffer or as evil is done. The previous psalm was set in a time of horrible suffering, yet there was no complaint. How can we keep our faith and our composure when things go so horribly against us? We continue to remember God, and remembering His nature, His work and what He has promised to do, so we praise Him.

Such praise to God is common in the psalms, but we do not normally associate it in our own minds with the final judgment. But the world ending, punishment on the wicked pronouncing, judgment is what this psalm cites as reason for praise of God for His mighty works. We like to avoid thoughts of judgment and retribution, but they are a mighty and proper work of God. "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." (2 Thess. 1:6-8)

The Lord Rules The World In Righteousness

2 When I select an appointed time, It is I who judge with equity.
3 The earth and all who dwell in it melt; It is I who have firmly set its pillars. Selah.
4 I said to the boastful, 'Do not boast,' And to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn;
5 Do not lift up your horn on high, Do not speak with insolent pride.'"

In His own time and by His own righteousness God will judge the world. It will as melt, "with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." Peter adds. (2 Pet. 3:10) Peter said that because of

this the righteous should consider "what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (vs. 11). Asaph says that the wicked should not be boastful and proud. The certainty of the judgment should immediately and continually impact the conduct of all men. Thoughts of judgment compel the righteous to continue in righteousness and, when such thoughts occur to the wicked, it should cause them to cease their evil.

Further Warning To The Proud

6 For not from the east, nor from the west, Nor from the desert comes exaltation;

7 But God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another.

8 For a cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; It is well mixed, and He pours out of this; Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs.

Man so often thinks that place and position come either by chance or are completely controlled by men. But God is in charge. He oversees the rise and fall of empires and houses. He also judges the same. When ascendant, man thinks only of his own power and position. When cast down, man thinks only of the power and position lost. Because man in both positions forgets God and His will and His way, they are judged and condemned. But the righteous remembers God in all stations and situations of life.

Anticipation Of Glory

9 But as for me, I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

10 And all the horns of the wicked He will cut off, But the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.

Asaph, a righteous man, speaks and sings of God with the confidence of a man who "knows whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." (2 Tim. 1:12) This confidence remains in the heart of the righteous man in spite of the fact that every indication is that this psalm was written when the proud and wicked were ascendant. Confidence remains because he knows the final and ultimate outcome of the wicked and the ultimate glorious of the righteous.

Let "We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks, For Thy name is near; Men declare Thy wondrous works" (vs. 1) also be our cry song and cry when depressed or oppressed and when in need of deliverance. Praise God, for He has an ultimate cure for every evil that is not repented of, the judgment.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 11.5; May, 2004

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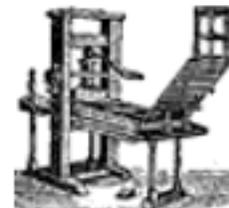


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Mercy and Truth; Righteousness and Peace

Psalms 85:10

"Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other," (Psalms 85:10).

As the diligent student reads through the Word of God and devotes attention to various passages, it becomes clear that God has linked certain things together. Once we understand this, we shouldn't have any trouble realizing that man has no business tampering with or unconnecting things God has put together. As in marriage, so with other things God has put together: "...what God has joined together, let not man separate," (Matt. 19:6).

Notice some things God has put together: Faith is expressed by works of obedience (Jas. 2:14-26); Love is manifested through obedience (Jno. 14:15); Christ is the Head of His church (Eph. 5:23); and Reverence toward deity is displayed through acts of worship (Jno. 4:24). These are things God has put together.

And, in Psalms 85:10, "mercy and truth have met together," and "righteousness and peace" are likewise joined. What do these connections tell us about the person of Deity?

It is a mistake to regard God as a multi-personality being. When we study His attributes and characteristics, there may be a tendency to divide the Supreme Person of Deity into "blocks" of character - His power, then (separate from that), His love, etc. But this isn't the way God is. He is a unified whole person, each attribute connected to the other.

God's truth and mercy are compatible. That means, there is nothing about God's origination and His revelation of truth that interferes with His mercy. Both are part of the whole character of God. Likewise, His righteousness and peace enjoy perfect harmony.

It follows - if someone suggests that there is some sort of conflict between God's mercy and God's truth, that suggestion ought to be quickly rejected. All theories, doctrines or arguments which array one quality of God against another are in error, regardless of the debater, the cause or the consequence.

For instance, the mercy of God which brings about pardon for sin is wrought through the message, the gospel of Christ. God's mercy is active in forgiving us, but this mercy is executed through the message,

the truth of the gospel. No conflict!

Also, the demands of God's perfect righteousness were met by the Savior's meritorious death, "the righteous for the unrighteous." As a result, sinners can be reconciled to God, thus "making peace." [1 Pet. 3:18; Eph. 2:14-22] In the gospel plan of salvation, revealed in the New Testament of Jesus Christ, there is "Mercy and Truth" meeting each other, and righteousness and peace kissing each other.

But perhaps you've heard something like this: I know what the truth (of God's Word) says, but I believe mercy demands that we tolerate violation. This pits mercy against truth; it actually places mercy above truth. Objecting to the application of truth on grounds of mercy is not plausible! Objecting to righteousness on grounds of peace is likewise invalid. In God's person and in God's perfect revelation, mercy and truth meet; righteousness and peace kiss.

It is commendable to "pursue peace with all people," but the same verse says we must also pursue "holiness, without which no one will see the Lord," (Heb. 12:14). Christians are to "be diligent to be found by Him in peace," but the same verse adds: "without spot and blameless," (2 Pet. 3:14). The "wisdom that is from above is" peaceable but it is "first pure," (Jas. 3:17). It is a mistake, therefore, to isolate peace from other virtues and qualities and build some kind of "loop-hole" or permissive argument on the grounds of peace alone!

"Affection" and "mercy" motivates us to be likeminded (Phil. 2:1-2), but we are warned not to boast or lie against the truth (Jas. 3:14).

The truth and love of Christ motivates us to "glorify God for His mercy ... But in every nation who ever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him," (Rom. 15:9; Acts 10:35).

The God who made us and who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth," (Ex. 34:6).

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 1.4; April, 1994

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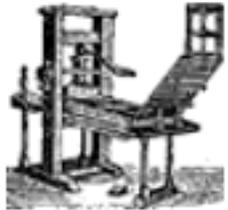
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God Is Still God

Psalm 88

It has been observed in Bible resource books and commentaries, that the 88th Psalm is the most mournful of all the psalms.

Barnes Commentary:

This psalm is altogether of a mournful and desponding character. The author is a sufferer; he is expecting to die; he fears to die; he longs to live; his mind is overwhelmed with gloom which does not seem to be irradiated by one ray of hope or consolation.

Adam Clarke:

The earnest prayer of a person in deep distress, abandoned by his friends and neighbors, and apparently forsaken of God, 1-18.

Matthew Henry:

This psalm is a lamentation, one of the most melancholy of all the psalms; and it does not conclude, as usually the melancholy psalms do, with the least intimation of comfort or joy, but, from first to last, it is mourning and woe.

Pulpit Commentary:

This is the darkest, saddest psalm of all the Psalms.

These conclusions do not represent just the first impression of these scholars. After much thought and study of Psalms 88, the typical commentary appraisal is it is entirely negative, totally given to the expression of grief and despair.

True (if you haven't already, read it now), it seems to be a picture of un-alleviated misery, seldom found anywhere in the Scriptures. Often, in the book of Psalms, you will be able to find hope even in between statements of despair. In many of the Psalms there is lamentation and negative emotions honestly expressed, yet they are resolved by some statement of hope and trust. Not in Psalms 88, we may immediately conclude.

In Psalms 88, from verse 1 to the end of the chapter expresses the emotions of one who is writing from the pit, deep in despair. Even after you grant the writer literary license to use exaggerated poetic language, this poem cannot be lifted to any level of joy it seems. It is a continuous, bitter expression of one living deep in despair, sometimes with language that may seem to border on reproach against God.

The study of this may in some ways be unpleasant but like all Scripture, there can be a positive result for us, as we explore the text and apply the message.

The more I read Psalms 88, the greater my conviction, this was written by someone suffering from their own sin. {I'm going to show you how I arrived at this conclusion.} First, let's deal with this briefly.

The heading above verse 1 associates this passage with the sons of Korah, and a contemplation of a man called "Heman the Ezrahite." Beyond this identification, we have no definite history to connect to the Psalm. There is no circumstance written elsewhere that sheds light on this that I am aware of. The sons of Korah were those descended from Korah - according to 2 Chron. 20:19, involved in musical composition.

One of them was Heman, who according to 1 Chron. 6:33; 15:17, was a grandson of Samuel. He was named as a "seer" in 2 Chron. 29:14,30, and apparently took a leading part in worship services. All of this is interesting - but fails to provide specific insight that would help us with Psalms 88.

That means our work in Psalms 88 depends mostly on the words - the content of the chapter, plus - the general Bible principles we take with us into the study of any passage. We take with us into this study what we have learned in Bible study outside of Psalms 88. What we know about God. What we know about humans. What we know about sin.

We take all that truth with us into Psalms 88, hopefully, to determine the meaning and message. So let me say again - my conclusion is, Psalms 88 was written by someone suffering from his own sin.

[Notice, several statements in the passage and their accumulated impact:](#)

In Verse 1, the writer addresses Deity: "O Lord, God of my salvation." Whoever the writer was; whatever the personal context, the first thought in the opening sentence of the poem affirms two things: The writer needs salvation. The writer knows that only God can save him. Do not overlook the personal way this is expressed: The "God of my salvation." What has been called "the saddest of all the psalms," begins with this word of trust and hope; even if it be the only such statement in the chapter - The "God of my salvation."

Next, I want us to look in verse 3, at the writer's grievance: "My soul is full of troubles." In this expression there is no complaint about some physical affection; and there is no claim that unforeseen circumstances are to blame. No direct evidence of being a victim of injustice.

"My soul is full of troubles." This points to internal, spiritual trouble; turmoil of spirit having immediate impact on the inner man. In verse 5, the writer is "adrift among the dead." Now remember, we take with us into this study everything we have learned from the Bible outside of Psalms 88 - what we know about

God, about man, about sin!

What is it that would cause someone's soul to be full of troubles and adrift among the dead? I know of only one thing: Sin! When Paul wrote to the Ephesians about what the gospel saved them from, he said, before they obeyed the gospel they were "dead in trespasses and sins," (Eph. 2:1). This leads me to believe Psalms 88 was written by one suffering under the guilt and bondage of his own sin - thus, "adrift among the dead." If I'm right about this by his choices to disobey God, he finds himself "adrift among" those who are spiritually dead.

Verse 7: "your wrath lies heavy upon me." Let's ask ourselves - What is the wrath of God against? Is the wrath of God arbitrarily? Is the wrath of God unjust? For the answer, look at Romans 1:18 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

If you are suffering with some physical infirmity it cannot be affirmed that the cause is the wrath of God. If you are suffering as a victim, or suffering for righteousness' sake - It cannot be argued, the cause is the wrath of God. But, if you are violating God's law; if you are living in sin, doing the devil's will, the wrath of God lies heavy upon you. Col. 3:6 teaches, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.

Verse 14a: "Why do you cast off my soul?" Why would God cast off a soul? Given all we know of God, we do not believe He would cast off a soul arbitrarily. But God has said He will not overlook; He will not endorse or fellowship that which is evil. Hab. 1:13 teaches his eyes are too pure to look on evil, and He "cannot tolerate wrong."

Then, also in verse 14: "Why do You hide Your face from me?" Again our question remains: Why would God hide His face from someone? Turn over to Isaiah 59:1,2. Isaiah is telling the people, why they no longer enjoy the favor of God.

"Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear." (ESV, Isa. 59:1,2)

God will hide His face from the sinner! Do you see why I believe this was written by one suffering from his own sin?

I'm looking at each description of despair. I'm attempting to understand each phrase in harmony with everything else the Bible says about God, man and sin. And I'm giving force to the accumulated impact of all these phrases, set into the literary context of this poem. The writer's perspective is - One suffering from his own sin.

What this teaches us should be obvious: The Bible teaches there is no problem that could invade your

life worse than sin! No illness or injury is as bad as sin. No suffering caused by injustice can bring into your life, the ruin sin can bring. There is no financial tragedy; there is no unforeseen tragedy as terrible as sin! Let me take you back into some of these statements in Psalms 88: Verse 4: "...a man who has no strength..." Verse 6: "...laid down in the lowest pit..." Also in verse 6: "...in darkness," (a common figure depicting evil or sin).

Verse 8: "...an abomination..."

Verse 15: "...I am distraught..."

Verse 16: "...your fierce wrath has gone over me..."

I read these statements and ask myself - What could cause this utter misery. And the only answer I can give is - Sin! The writer's perspective is - One suffering from his own sin.

Back into the chapter, let me take us to verse 8, where the sinner says about his condition: "...I am shut up, and I cannot get out..." Here is something basic we must learn about sin. The Bible teaches - Sin is a personal problem we cannot solve on our own! We cannot save ourselves from sin on our own; through our own resolve and resources. This is the point made by Paul several times.

Titus 3:5 - "not by works of righteousness which we have done."

In 2 Tim. 1:9 - "not according to our works."

Or in Eph. 2 - "not of works," and "not of yourselves."

Once we begin to live outside of God's will - in that disobedience and the guilt of sin, we cannot fix that problem on our own! Thus the sinner says: "I am shut up, and I cannot get out." So my understanding is, Psalms 88 is designed to vividly show us the despair of one who lives in sin. The profound misery of the guilt of sin. Utterly forsaken; cut off; engulfed in darkness. "I am shut up, and I cannot get out."

Is it true, there is no hope in the passage?

Where is the hope? There seems to be such stress on the sorrow; such un-alleviated misery, no positive note can be found. I quoted Barnes earlier, who said "This psalm is altogether of a mournful and desponding character."

I disagree; perhaps I disagree with most commentators in regard to this text. I think hope can be found in Psalms 88. Hope is discovered in one simple truth - God is still God!

Let us not overlook the first verse. Observe how the psalm begins, by addressing the Lord, "God of my salvation." As bad as life was for the sinner God was still God, and the sinner was addressing God; crying out to Him, "day and night!"

Arguments can be made as to how close the sinner was to full repentance. But there is no question: he acknowledged the Lord as the God of his salvation, and he cried out to Him day and night.

Then, let me take us to verses 10-12, where you'll find a series of questions. Whatever literary interpretation one might assign to the questions, they strongly imply the truth about who God is.

"Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"
(Psa. 88:10-12)

Let me say again, whatever literary interpretation one might give to the questions and their intent in the emotions of the writer, they strongly imply the truth about who God is.

Notice:

God is able to work wonders.

He can raise the dead.

He is worthy of praise.

God has this quality - Lovingkindness.

God is faithful, and God is righteous!

In whatever state of despair the writer might be describing, he denies none of these truths about who God is! Remember - the writer begins with the affirmation that God is the God of His salvation. The writer suffers from the guilt of his own sin. But he knows who God is, and even in his despair -maintains clear concepts of who God is.

All of which leads me to this point for us today à Who God is, does not change! We change. We sin; hopefully we repent; those are changes. Sin is a change in the wrong direction. Repentance, change in the right direction. We change. But before we sin, after we sin; whether we repent or not - - God is still God; and He is the God of our salvation.

I'd like for us to notice one more thing in Psalms 88. Given the assumption, that the writer is suffering from his own sin, it is noteworthy - enough awareness of God remained for him to call upon God. In verse 1: "I have cried out day and night before You." In verse 2: "Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry." Whatever the writer's state of mind - he knew enough of God, to continue his struggle toward the God of his salvation.

Conclusion:

There is no kind of suffering equal to the ravages of sin. No physical problem; no financial problem; no lost relationship; no tragedy or fear of unforeseen trouble. There is nothing as bad as sin.

We cannot rescue ourselves from the peril of sin. It is not in man that walks, to direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23). We must look to God - regarding Him as the God of our salvation, willing to accept what He offers in Christ.

Today, to all who live in sin, God remains the God of our salvation. The story of the salvation He provides today is - the gospel.

The best way I know to end this study is to call to our attention the gospel of Christ. You do not have to live in sin. You have to recognize that you have sinned. But the message of the gospel is you do not have to live in sin!

Nobody needs to experience the misery described in Psalms 88. If you know who Christ is, what He did - and you believe in Him - no reason to live in the deep pit of sin; no reason to let disobedience to God ruin your life. If you are willing to act on your belief in Christ - in obedience to the gospel - you can be raised from that ugly pit out of sin, and into Christ.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 14.7; July 2007

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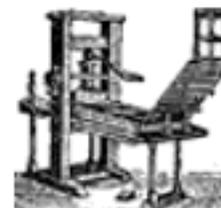


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Marks Of Those Who Love The Lord

Psalm 91:14-16

(Scanned from Christianity Magazine, Feb. 1989, p.#57)

"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation." Psalms 91:14-16

Here the psalmist mentions some of the distinguishing characteristics of those who truly love God, and tells us what God will do for them. Notice them with me:

They have set their love upon the Lord (verse 14). The Christian's heart has been turned away from the world in the direction of God. Paul described the Thessalonians as those who had "turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). Thus, God's child has turned to Him, and away from sin (see also Romans 6:17-18; Colossians 3:1-2). It is only when we have this understanding and, thus, this kind of commitment that we can be acceptable. Many people have a passing interest in Christ (Luke 8:11-14; Mark 7:6), but this is not enough. Those who love the Lord have set their love on Him (John 14:15; Matthew 22:37-39).

They know His name (verse 14). All of us know people whom we are very close to; our dear friends are people we have spent considerable time with. They are ones we have tested and tried; their friendship has been proven. To "know" God is to trust Him, to believe Him. The psalmist says elsewhere, "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Jehovah, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee," (9:10). Abraham knew God - he trusted Him (Romans 4:3; 17-23). On the other hand, the wicked do not "know" God, and they are cursed because of it: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:24).

They pray effectively (verse 15). "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." Those who love the Lord have the assurance that their prayers will be answered; they may confidently express their dependence on God. Some men, of course, God will not hear. "Jehovah is far from the wicked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" . . . "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his

prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 15:29; 28:9; see also 1:24-31 and Job 27:8-9). However, God's ears are open and receptive to His faithful followers (1 Peter 3:12; Psalm 18:3,6).

The Lord is with them in trouble (verse 15). Notice, please, that they are not immune to trouble. We must see that there is actually some benefit to us when trouble arises. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold trials; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). Trials serve to make our faith stronger, so we will have testing times in this life. However, we have the assurance that God is with us in all our troubles. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). "So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?" (Hebrews 13:6; see also Romans 8:31-39 and Philippians 4:13).

They will be saved (verse 16). When God "shows us His salvation," it will be worth it all. Paul said, "For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8; see also 1 Peter 1:3-9; Luke 18: 29-30) .

What a wonderful description the psalmist gives us here of those who love the Lord. If you will "set your love" on the Lord and "know" Him, all these things - and more - will be yours.

By Brent Lewis
From Expository Files 4.12; December 1997

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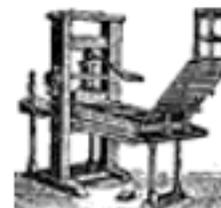


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Certain Majesty of God

Psalm 93

We must never doubt the Lord's strength, nor should we lack confidence in His wisdom or purpose. There is a hymn which proclaims "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!" Those who live by faith possess assurance.

Sometimes, the world tries to make us lose sight of our reason for gladness. Through ordeals that we must face because we live in a fallen world, it may be that we sometimes allow our hope to grow dim. When we face persecution. When we suffer loss. When our health fails. When sin in the world seems so strong and God's truth is maligned. It is times like these that we especially need to remember Who it is that has declared "I will not forsake you, nor will I ever desert you," so that we may confidently declare to the world, "The Lord is my helper, I shall not be afraid." (Hebrews 13:5,6).

The Text

"The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty;
The Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength;
Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.
Thy throne is established from of old;
Thou art from everlasting.
The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
The floods have lifted up their voice;
The floods have lifted up their pounding waves.
More than the sounds of many waters,
Than the mighty breakers of the sea,
The LORD on high is mighty.
Thy testimonies are fully confirmed;
Holiness befits Thy house, O LORD, forever more.
(Psalm 93).

The Lord's Reign

"The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty... Thy throne is established from of old..." (Psalm 93:1a;2a).

When did the Lord's reign begin? In one sense, it had no beginning, but is as eternal as He is. In the New Testament we read, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." (Hebrews 1:8). The LORD God reigns supreme in His universe. There is no power above Him. He is the source of all authority and dominion. Even in the darkest of times, the Lord has not abdicated His throne; He still sits upon it, observes, and takes action as he determines according to the intention of His will. For example, the book of Revelation was written during a time of extreme persecution against the church. God's people were suffering much, and perhaps were wondering why God did not act. The very first scene in this great apocalyptic vision is that of God still on His throne allowing mankind time to repent before intervening. John writes that he saw "A throne standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance." (Revelation 4:2,3).

Never cease to doubt God's eternal rule in His universe, no matter how dark the hour; nor never cease to allow Him to rule in your heart. He cannot be removed from His heavenly throne, but He will not rule from the throne of your heart without your yielding it to Him.

The Lord's Strength

"The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength... The LORD on high is mighty." (Psalm 93:1b;4b).

Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13). We must believe that God is powerful and have confidence that He is able to do all that is necessary to see us safely home.

There was once a man who made a request of Jesus, His request showed at least two things; it showed that he had faith while at the same time it showed that his faith was not all that it could and should have been. It was a request made by a father for his son who was severely afflicted. The father asked, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" to which Jesus replied, "'If you can!' All things are possible to him who believes." The father responded, "I do believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:22-24).

With God, it is not a matter of "can He?" though it is sometimes a matter of His divine plan, will and purpose. Concerning our salvation, God is able. John once told the multitudes that if it were according to His purpose, "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." (Matthew 3:9). He is able to always provide a way of escape from temptation. He is able to guard that which we commit to Him until that day. He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. He is able to do exceedingly beyond all we ask for or think (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 2:18; Ephesians 3:20).

The Lord's Purpose

"Indeed the world is firmly established, it will not be moved." (Psalm 93:1c).

You get the feeling it was a "done deal" from the beginning when you read the Bible. It was. From the first announcement of what would become known as the plan of redemption in the garden of Eden following the fall to its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, it was predestined. Nothing could alter or

change it, though Satan tried. He tried to mislead the people of the promise, and though all too successful, he could not derail the plan. He tried to destroy them during Esther's day, but failed. The Messiah would be brought forth from the Hebrew nation. God's promises do not fail.

The church of Christ exists today because God's purpose cannot be thwarted by any power, man's or angelic. The world has been firmly set; it would allow for redemption to take place, and its history records that God's plan for human redemption was fulfilled by Jesus on the cross "in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church... this was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Ephesians 3:10,11; cf. 2 Timothy 1:9).

The Lord's Timelessness

"Thou art from everlasting." (Psalm 93:2b).

God is eternal. He has no beginning or end. He is the first cause. There would be nothing if not for the fact of God's existence and purpose.

God greatly desires all to be saved, and patiently and mercifully grants men time to repent. By man's reckoning, God has granted us a long time; almost two thousand years since His Son promised to return. Why do believers still believe the promise after all this time?

Because God is eternal. It has not been either a long time or a short time to Him. He is timeless. "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8,9).

The Lord's Testimonies

"Thy testimonies are fully confirmed" (Psalm 93:5a).

When the Lord says a thing, you can believe it completely. This is yet another reason for the Christian's confidence even when the days are evil. As James pointed out, "Behold, we count as blessed those who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and merciful." (James 5:11).

Like Job, we hold fast our integrity. We await the day of our vindication and redemption. We do not doubt that the final outcome of the Lord's dealings with us will be abundant blessing. We do not waver "for He who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23). The hope we have is an anchor for our souls, sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:19).

The Lord's House

"Holiness befits Thy house, O LORD, forevermore." (Psalm 93:5b).

We are God's household. We are His temple. Our hearts provide Him a throne from which He rules our lives and gives us peace which passes understanding.

Holy and righteous conduct is the only proper standard of behavior for the Christian in every circumstance, for we are God's dwelling place (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

It is a great realization to know of God's presence in our lives. We need such confidence as this brings. We need to be able to face life head on without anxiety or rage or despair. In Christ we "are being built together into a dwelling place of God" (Ephesians 2:22). The Carpenter from Nazareth is still at work!

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.11; November 1997

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Beware of Sinful Anger

Psalm 106:32-33

"They angered Him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them; because they rebelled against His Spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips." - Psalm 106:32-33

The 106th Psalm actually records the historical accounts of the different rebellions and transgressions of the children of Israel as they were walking with God in the early part of their existence. In the verses above, the psalmist talks about a particular incident, saying: "They [the children of Israel] angered Him [God] also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them; because they rebelled against His Spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips." Some translations (particularly the Old King James Version) says that they "provoked His Spirit, and he spoke rashly with his lips." Because of the Hebrew word that has been translated as "rebellion," or "provocation" here, there has been a disagreement with various scholars as to whether or not the rebellion that is spoken of here was a provocation against God's Holy Spirit, or whether it was a provocation against Moses' spirit.

But I believe when you read this in its context - if you keep in mind what the Psalmist is bringing to our attention as it relates to the event which is also recorded in Numbers 20:1-13 - it is not difficult to understand that it was MOSES who spoke rashly with his lips!

If that is the correct understanding, then that tells us that Moses became angry with the Israelites to the point of sinning. The result of this rebellion was the fact that Moses spoke rashly. (See Numbers 20)

Anger has the potential of doing great harm when it's not controlled. Moses said things that he would normally not say. He may have been provoked by a faithless group of people, but he wound up speaking words that did not bring glory to God! Instead, his words wrongfully brought glory to himself and Aaron. When Moses spoke to the children of Israel on this occasion, he said: "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10; Emphasis Mine: JH). Because of their anger, Moses and Aaron both did things that they normally would not have done: they disobeyed God's directives: they struck the rock instead of directly speaking to it.

There is a great truth that we need to learn from this, and apply to our lives: not all anger is necessarily sinful.

In fact, there are times when a righteous anger is something that is appropriate, just as long as it doesn't give opportunity for Satan to lead us to sin. When you read the Psalms you will often find that there are

psalms which will begin with the writer calling down God's wrath upon his enemies; those writings manifest a kind of anger. They are sometimes referred to as the "imprecatory psalms," and what they are simply doing is expressing the anger of the individual who is beseeching God to come down upon His enemies in His holy righteousness and judgment.

But in Psalm 4:4, the writer plainly says: "be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still." Paul refers to this passage in the Ephesian letter, in which he also is dealing with the problem of anger, telling people how they may properly react to challenging situations of conflict.

Paul does say that there are times that are appropriate for a righteous kind of anger to be manifested... he writes, (quoting from Psalm 4, in verse 4): "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). But then he goes on to say... "do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Emphasis Mine: JH).

There are times when righteous anger is the appropriate response to things that may be happening. But we need to be aware of the fact that, if anger raises up in us, and we allow it to turn into thoughts of rage... if that leads us into speaking words and doing things that are not in keeping with the will of God, we will actually be guilty of dishonoring God. And by dishonoring God, we obviously are not glorifying Him. Instead, we may actually be harming other people and hindering the godly influence we are suppose to have; that's when anger can becomes sinful.

We have to be aware of this kind of sinful anger. It is inevitable that, when this kind of anger has the opportunity to take hold, even if it is just for short moment, (perhaps even an instantaneous moment), it will throw us off of our mental balance. And if we speak rashly with our lips, we will dishonor God.

By John Hagenbuch
From Expository Files 12.8; August 2005

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Something in Return

Psalm 116

This is one of those passages in Psalms where the writer has enjoyed deliverance from peril by the hand of Jehovah. In the Psalm, he is expressing his gratitude and praise.

This is Psalm 116:

"I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."

(Psalms 116:1-19, KJV).

Here is a man who knew what it really meant to be saved; to be delivered from peril by the hand of God. Here he expresses his praise and gratitude to God.

While there is much here to digest, let's focus on a question raised in verse 12. "What shall I render unto Jehovah for all His benefits toward me?"

First, consider these observations about the question:

This is about **OUR RESPONSE TO THE GOODNESS OF GOD WE HAVE ENJOYED.**

We will observe, in a few moments, some of the vast benefits we enjoy from the hand of God. As we enumerate those blessings and as we enjoy good things from God, we must personally deal with the matter of how we will respond. How have we responded. How are we responding to God, for all His benefits toward us? This is relevant for us, in this dispensation. For the New Testament is about heaven's grace manifested in Christ, and man's response. That's what this is about in Psalms 116! This question in verse twelve is about our response to the goodness of God we have enjoyed.

But, in our response to God's goodness, whatever we do, we never repay Him equally or in full! We have to bear in mind, we are imperfect responders to a perfect Giver! There are at least two ways we come to this awareness: (1) Learning of God's majesty; holiness and perfection .. this happens when we engage in a careful, thoughtful reading of His Word. (2) Learning of our sin, as we do in passages like Romans 1-3. As we learn of God's goodness and our imperfection, we become more and more aware that we are imperfect responders to a perfect God. We ought to respond to God's goodness; it is imperative to listen to Him and obey Him and trust His Son who died for us. But when we have done all we can do; even when we excel and perform very well in serving the Lord -- we never repay Him equally on in full. (see Luke 17:10).

Concerning the benefits of God enjoyed by His people, notice four things in this text:

Verse 1 -- "I love Jehovah, because he heareth my voice and my supplications." It is clear from this, the writer knew prayer as a benefit from God. Through knowledge and experience, he knew God had heard his voice and had considered his supplications. So in verse 1, there is mention of the blessing, the privilege of prayer. In our thinking about prayer, it may help us to regard prayer as a privilege ... not a demand; not even a right; not a matter of telling God what to do but A PRIVILEGE. Even Jesus maintained this attitude; in Jno. 11:41, in the raising of Lazarus, he said after that miracle: "Father, I thank you that you have heard Me." How much more should we have this attitude.

The blessing of preservation is suggested in verse 6 -- it says: "Jehovah preserveth the simple." The "simple" are those without guile; those who are sincere and honest and genuine in their dedication to God. The word is "simplehearted" in the New International Version. Even if you interpret "the simple" to mean those who are gullible and immature, God cares for them. This is further testimony of His goodness. And in the New Testament, 1 Peter 1:5 testifies that we are "kept by the power of God." There is the benefit of salvation; notice this in the last part of verse 6 -- the writer says, "I was brought low, and he saved me."

Some believe this Psalm was written by David; others argue in favor of King Hezekiah as the writer. In either case - those men were "brought low," and Jehovah did save them. But we can apply & echo the same confession; we were brought low by our practice of sin - then, when we responded to the Good News, Jehovah saved us.

Fourth, notice in verse 7 -- "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; For Jehovah hath dealt bountifully with thee." This is a more general statement of God's bountiful providential dealings toward us. These are benefits of God toward man; here in the context of Psalm 116: God hearing our supplications, in verse 1.

The preservation of the "simple," in verse 6 and the blessing of salvation. Then in verse 7, God's bountiful dealings with the soul of man. Now - let these thoughts, in Psalms 116, lead us further into a study of God's benefits and there are two broad categories:

PHYSICAL BENEFITS.

There is an early example of this, in Genesis 9:3 when Noah and his family came out of the ark, God said: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you." One of Job's friends said: "God giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields," (Job 5:10). Psalms 136:25 -- God "giveth food to all flesh." And at Lystra, Paul testified: "And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness," (Acts 14:17). Therefore, when we breathe, eat, relax, drink water and enjoy things here on earth, we ought to acknowledge God as the origin of it all.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS.

Jesus Christ - the salvation which is now available in Him - is the greatest benefit God has ever given to man; the supreme example of God's love for man, and His determination that sinners must have a way to be saved. In the first chapter of Ephesians, we are impressed by how great a gift this is. Verse 3 affirms that "every spiritual blessing" is located IN CHRIST, then Paul gives us a list:

Verse 4 - "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."

Verse 5 - He "foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ."

Verse 6 - The grace of God is freely bestowed on us.

Verse 7 - "we have our redemption through his blood."

Verse 8 - wisdom and prudence.

All through this passage; all through Ephesians; and all through the New Testament we see the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ as something we need and something we can have! It can do us a great deal of good to spend some time reading and thinking about THE BENEFITS OF GOD TOWARD US, physical and spiritual. (See also, Acts 17:25; Jas. 1:17).

HOW ARE WE RESPONDING TO OUR GREAT BENEFACITOR?

Look again, at verse 12 in Psalm 116 ---> "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?"

I would like to identify EIGHT THINGS we should render unto God ...

-- Remember, this is about responding to the goodness of God.

-- We can never repay Him fully ... but there is the imposing reality of God's goodness toward us....

-- What should we render unto Him?

LOVE.

Notice verse 1 again: "I love Jehovah, because he heareth my voice and my supplications." This is written as CAUSE and EFFECT. The writer's supplications were heard (this was the cause); he loved Jehovah (this was the effect). "I love Jehovah, because he heareth my voice and my supplications." You know, there is another statement, much like this - where God causes us to love Him; He does something, and what He does and who He is motivates us or causes us to love Him. I'm think of 1 Jno. 4:19 - where the apostle John said, "We love, because He first loved us." Now, this is not about God forcing us to love Him; this is about God giving us reason to love Him by His majesty bounty toward us, attending by amazing grace. "I love Jehovah, because he heareth my voice and my supplications... We love, because He first loved us..."

God has so manifested Himself to us, and so loved us and provided for us, there is every reason for me to love Him, and to love Him fully. Jesus said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." And John said: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments," (Matt. 22:37; 1 Jno. 5:3). Real obedience is based on real love - and that brings about a real relationship with God!!

PRAISE.

In the religious world today the word "praise" has become popular. What does it mean? According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: "The word comes from the Latin PRETIUM, 'price,' or 'value,' and may be defined generally as an ascription of value or worth ... true praise consists in a sincere acknowledgment of a real conviction of worth." (Vol. IV, p.#2429). In other words - you are convinced that something has worth or value; the expression of that conviction is PRAISE.

You begin with a knowledge of God; knowing Him, you are impressed by His power, His worthiness and love; you develop convictions about God, AND AS THOSE CONVICTIONS FIND EXPRESSION, in words, deeds, songs and behavior - - that's praise. The more acquainted we are with God, the more inclined we are to praise Him; to express our convictions of His worth. Notice in verse 19 of our text: "In the courts of Jehovah's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise Ye Jehovah!" (See the last five chapters of Psalms.)

And did you know that Acts 2:46 & 47 says: WHEN THE GOSPEL WAS FIRST PROCLAIMED AND OBEYED, those disciples praised God. Many are the benefits we have from God - what will our response be? It should be, to love Him and praise Him ... and

WORSHIP HIM.

Worship, of course, is a form of praise but is considered separately. Listen to this appeal, made in the 95th Psalm: "Oh, come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker: For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand ...," (vss.6,7a).

In the 96th Psalm, a similar appeal: "Ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. Oh worship Jehovah in holy array ...," (vss. 8,9a).

In Revelation 14 there is the admonition to worship God and give Him glory (verse 7). In Rev. 4:11, the 24 elders fall down before Him, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and

power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created." John 4:24 exhorts us to worship Him "in spirit and in truth." Worship - in all these passages - is the response from the heart touched by the goodness of God. And, in view of all His benefits to us, how can we claim to be too tired, or too busy to worship Him, as He has directed?

FEAR.

When we consider who God is we should be prompted to love Him; to praise Him and worship Him, but also, there is FEAR. And this is not just sheer terror. This is, basically, respect; holding God in the highest esteem; along with this - dreading any thought of displeasing Him.

Here's the idea:

Psa. 33:8,9 -- "Let all the earth fear Jehovah: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast."

Prov. 8:13 -- "The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, do I hate."

Psa. 4:4 -- "Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

Ezra 10:3 -- "those that tremble at the commandment of God."

In the New Testament ...

Heb. 12:28 -- "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe."

1 Pet. 2:17 -- "Fear God."

Remember what our study is about: "What shall we render unto God?" We should love Him. We should praise Him. We should worship Him. We should fear Him. He has dealt with us bountifully!

OUR BODIES.

There may be - in many - this kind of attitude: "My body is mine ... I'll use my body as I want ... I'll do whatever I want with my body." {In Tampa, "Gasparilla;" In New Orleans, "Mardi Grai;" Here in South Texas and in Florida, "Spring Break!"}

So there are people abusing their bodies; neglecting their bodies. Using their bodies to fulfill unholy purposes because "it feels good."

The right attitude is reflected in this famous statement: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service." (Rom.12:1).

SERVICE.

Now don't forget our question, raised by the writer: "What shall I render unto Jehovah for all his benefits toward me?" And one answer is OBEDIENT SERVICE. No human being can escape service of some sort, either you are serving God or you're serving sin. You certainly are not doing both at the same time. Either I am serving God, or I am serving sin. All right, when I consider all the vast blessings of God, both physical and spiritual - IT OUGHT TO BE OBVIOUS TO ME, I SHOULD BE SERVING HIM.

Sin has nothing to offer me. Satan promises what he cannot give, and he gives what he never promised. So it says in verse 16 -- "O Jehovah, truly I am thy servant: I am thy servant, the son of thy handmaid ..."
In gratitude for what God has done for us - there should be this interests in obedient service.

GRATITUDE.

As we meditate on all the good things we have from God -- our hearts should swell in gratitude; so verse 17 says: "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving..." The NT epistle to the Colossians is a rather brief document -- but it contains five different references to gratitude:

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you," (Colossians 1:3, KJV).

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:" (Colossians 1:12, KJV).

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6,7, KJV).

"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." (Colossians 3:17, KJV).

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2, KJV).

THE PAYMENT OF OUR VOWS.

Under Old Testament law, Jews could participate in certain vows, indicating penitence or renewed dedication to God; and the law was very emphatic in stating THAT THOSE VOWS HAD TO BE KEPT. Num. 30:2 said, "When a man voweth a vow unto Jehovah, or sweareth an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." (See also, Eccl. 5:4,5).

"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. " So the law was - if you decided to make a vow, you were bound to pay or keep it. (Eccl. 5:4,5). (There is an example of an informal vow in verse 2 of Psalms 116 -- "I will call on him as long as I live.")

Now notice - in our text, in Psalms 116, THESE STATEMENTS. In verse 14 -- "I will pay my vows unto Jehovah." Verse 18 -- "I will pay my vows unto Jehovah." How does that relate to us? It means that

every good commitment we've made to God, we must keep; TAKE IT SERIOUSLY! When we obeyed the gospel that was a commitment, a promise! In view of all the benefits we have from Him - how should we live after that initial response of obedience? This is about true covenant fidelity - based on love, respect and fear.

The benefits of God are impressive: "He himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." The question raised in our text is: "What shall I render unto Jehovah for all his benefits toward me?"

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 3.10; October 1996

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

"So Shall I Keep Your Law Continually"

Psalm 119:44-47

Most Bible students know that the longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119. The subject matter of this psalm, which many scholars believe was written by David, is the word of God. Nearly every verse in the psalm uses some synonym for God's word. The psalm is divided into sections of eight verses apiece, and each section has one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet at its heading. In verse 44 the psalmist says, "So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever." This should be our aim in life too. But how do we go about it?

In the next three verses, the psalmist tells us what he plans to do in keeping God's law. And when we do the same things, we shall keep His law continually as well.

I Seek Your Precepts

"And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts" (verse 45). To walk at liberty is to be free from all sin that would hinder us from keeping God's law (Romans 6:17-18). This liberty is not a license to do anything we want (Galatians 5:1-13). Rather it is the freedom to do and be what God wants. Thus, we can have this liberty only when we seek God's precepts. All people are seeking for something. It may be pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, power, fame, fortune, or whatever.

Some find what they are seeking, some do not, and some who find what they are seeking learn that it really was not what they wanted after all. Jesus promises that there is something which we can seek and find, and it will always be what we really need (Matthew 7:7-11). So, what we really need to seek is God's precepts. The word "precept" means "a direction meant as a rule of action or conduct." When one makes a recipe, he need to follow the directions. In life, God has certain directions for us to follow. "You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments" (Nehemiah 9:14). Just as God did for Israel in the Old Testament, He has done for us in the New Testament, and the only way that we can keep His law is to seek His precepts so that we can walk at liberty.

I Will Speak of Your Testimonies

"I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (verse 46). Keeping God's law involves not only our actions in seeking His precepts but also our speech in declaring His testimonies before others. To do this, we must first make sure that our speech is not characterized by things which God hates (Ephesians 4:29). Rather, we should use speech that will help, build up, and

encourage others (Colossians 4:6). Specifically, the psalmist said that he would speak God's testimonies before kings. David, if he be the author, certainly had communications with the various kings of the nations round about Israel and may have used them to talk about God.

We may not necessarily have the opportunity to speak before kings, but one way that we can always use our speech to help, build up, and encourage others is by telling them the good news of salvation in Christ (Acts 8:4, 1 Peter 3:15). The psalmist also says that he would not be ashamed. This may mean that he would not have anything to be ashamed about, but it may also mean that he was resolved not to feel ashamed (Romans 1:16, 2 Timothy 1:8). When people say that they believe something but never talk about it, it is almost as if they are ashamed of it, and they can often be more easily persuaded to turn away from it.

But if we really believe strongly enough in God's testimonies to speak them before others, we are much more likely to keep God's law continually.

I Will Delight Myself in Your Commandments

"And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love" (verse 47). We have seen that keeping God's law continually requires our actions in seeking His precepts, and our speech in declaring His testimonies. Now we find that it also requires our very minds, our thinking, our attitude of heart in delighting in His commandments.

Often, the character of a person's life is determined by what he delights in (Psalm 1:1-2). Therefore, we should always delight in God's commandments because they are important. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). And the beloved apostle wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Sometimes people will say that there is more to following God than just keeping commandments, and that is true. But the simple fact is that if we do not keep God's commandments, we do not love Him and we are not right in His sight. Yet, it is not enough just to keep His commandments. We need to love them. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). The truth is that we usually do that in which we delight, which we love. So when we truly delight in God's commandments and love them, then we will keep His law continually.

Conclusion

Therefore, if it is our desire to keep God's law continually, these are some things that we need to do to help us achieve our goal. We must seek God's precepts in all our actions. We must speak of His testimonies. And we must delight ourselves in His commandments.

Please do not misunderstand. The Bible does not teach that these things will always be easy. They will take dedication, effort, and commitment. But the Bible does teach that if we follow the prescription found in these verses, we shall be able to keep God's law continually. And God has surely promised to help us do so.

By Wayne S. Walker

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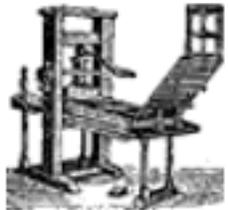
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

An Ideal Life (Psalm 128)

1 How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.

2 When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you.

3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table.

4 Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD.

5 The LORD bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

6 Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

The rewards of God for righteousness are not all consigned to the next life. The true and righteous servant of God will be abundantly rewarded. There is ultimately, and most surely, the future afterlife. The spiritual progress one makes in knowledge and purity of heart is also a sure reward. But there yet remains the possibility of vast blessings of a more temporal nature. I say that these are a possibility because the actions of evil men may rob us of all physical things, including life itself, or one may live in a time and place that is under the curse of judgment from on high due to widespread evil. But in normal circumstances the faithful will be able to construct lives that are not only in accordance with the will of God, but also richly blessed.

The Blessings In An Ideal Life

Fruitful Labor in Contentment. It is the blessing of God that we can enjoy the fruits of our labor. From the very beginning man has worked to this end. Work is not a curse, but is good for us. Certainly the curse has greatly increased the difficulty of our work, but work and its fruit are for our good. A man in a decent home with enough good things in it is content - if he worked to build it and paid for it with the wages earned by his own labor. Heirs of fortunes are very often lost souls, especially if they never do work of their own to add to or preserve what they have received. But the man of God who works patiently, gratefully receiving and building industriously in small increases, will not only do well, but will be rightly content in his accomplishments.

When Solomon considered all of life ("under the sun" as it is styled in the book of Ecclesiastes), he concluded the same thing. "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy

oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward." (Eccl. 5:18) The ideal life does not necessarily consist of the things that the world thinks is important; rather, it consists of work blessed by God, no matter what the net worth of the estate a man leaves behind.

Husband, Wife, Children and Grandchildren. The blessings of "Home, Sweet Home" are given by God. The family was the first institution God gave to man. Very quickly (probably on the first day of man's existence) God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Gen.2:18) The coming of man and woman together is still "too wonderful for me" (Prov. 30:19,20) and "a prudent wife is from the LORD." (Prov. 19:14)

The children that result from this union are a blessing of God. This passage calls up the imagery of the olive plant. The olive plant would produce new shoots all around it. The new shoots were produced and sustained by the same root. This common image is used to picture parents surrounded by their children at home around their table.

"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD." (Ps. 127:3) They are a blessing to us because they call forth in us our best affections and purest feelings. Here is a most sacred charge to uphold - to properly rear "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) those whom the Lord has given us. This endeavor is not for their benefit alone; it also makes the parents better. The proper patient rearing of children, with regard for God, so fundamentally improves us that one is not qualified to lead the people of God without having successfully and fully done it. "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity." (1 Tim. 3:4). God does not picture us building a solitary lonely home, or even being in one in our older years. Our children should recognize the great blessings they had in their home, grow up, and strive to produce the same thing for their children. The grandparents will have the double blessing of seeing yet another generation progressing in the Lord. Raising another faithful generation is part of the return children make to their parents.

Spiritual Progress of God's People. David's description does not leave out the spiritual things. David spoke of "bless[ing] you from Zion" and "the prosperity of Jerusalem" during the course of our lives. When God's people live a life that He can bless, they and their religious institutions (Israel in the Old Testament, the church in the New) will be greatly blessed. Fellowship with others who are striving to have blessed lives is great encouragement to do the same, and builds up the whole people.

Achieving The Ideal Life Through Fear Of The Lord

What a life this would be. A fruitful, contented life at work, at home and at church. What more could one rightly ask for? This is what we're all to seek. Yes, this is the ideal and we may fall short of it, but this is not an unobtainable utopia. We can confidently direct our lives toward it.

The fear of the Lord is the very root of the ideal life. It is so basic and important that it is actually stated twice in this short psalm, (verse 1 and 4) The fear of the Lord is reverence, dread to offend, anxiety to please, complete submission and obedience. In other places is it said to be "the beginning of

wisdom," (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10) and "clean, enduring forever." (Ps. 19:9) His compassion (Ps. 103:13) and His lovingkindness (Ps. 103:17) and His favor (Ps. 147:11) are on those that fear Him.

This fear of the Lord is very practical. It will cause us to walk in the way of God. When we live the right way, the way that God directs, good things flow as a matter of course. So the "the fear of the LORD leads to life," (Prov. 19:23) and is "a fountain of life" (Prov. 14:27) which "prolongs life." (Prov. 10:27) If the life we want is the life He wants for us, then our faithful labor and His continual blessing will cause it to happen for us.

Do you want a life like this? Then consider the admonitions of David: "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield," (Ps 115:11) and "O fear the LORD, you His saints; For to those who fear Him, there is no want." (Ps. 34:9) Walking in the fear of the Lord is very blessed life indeed. In fact, its almost ideal.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 11.4 April, 2004

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"My Heart is Not Proud"

Psalms 131

1 My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

2 But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

Some claim this passage expresses David's attitude of submission at the time he actually became king. Others think this was written in the time of the Jews' captivity, telling of the humility they learned in that ordeal. In either case, this text illustrates the submissive temper and humility that should be present in the heart of every child of God - that will produce contentment, peace, hope and cause us to behave in a manner that pleases the Lord.

The first statement in verse one should be the sincere confession of every child of God - "My heart is not proud."

Consider the heart. If we only had Proverbs and Psalms we would have sufficient information about what the heart is. Repeatedly, in Proverbs and Psalms we are told what the heart is and how the heart functions. We have statements like Prov. 4:23 ...

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

You may be more familiar with this translation of that verse:

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." The heart is that part of the inner man which is the source and center of every attitude, word and deed. All that we are is determined by the content of our hearts.

When I was in the Army in basic training there was this exercise called BIVOUAC ... about 14 days out in the woods under simulated combat conditions. At the campsite there would be these huge water bags hanging from a tree or pole. Around the bottom of the bag, several outlet tubes; you would put one of those tubes into your canteen and release a valve to replenish your water supply.

Now the mess sergeant who was in charge of this would put a huge salt tablet inside the water bag; this was at Ft. Benning Georgia in July, so you had to have salt tablets to prevent heat exhaustion. The salt

was put in the source - so it didn't matter which tube you used to fill your canteen, all the water that came from that bag had salt in it.

Whatever you put in your heart (the source) affects every issue of life (every outlet)! Because your heart is the source and center of all your life. If I put something impure in my heart, I have polluted the source!! If I put something pure in my heart, I have purified the source!! So in the NIV at Prov. 4:23 ...

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Now, if we will put the good things of God into our hearts - if we will put the Word of God and the Son of God into our hearts, our hearts will not be proud; our eyes will not be haughty. If I'm a Christian and the Word of God abides in me - this will be my confession: My heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. You cannot have God's Word in your heart, and be haughty at the same time. The heart is the source. If the Word of God is there, the source is pure and right and produces what is pure and right. Every Christian should be able to say, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty." And this humble disposition of faith produces the best kind of contentment.

Now we are still in verse 1, and in my judgment, the next phrase is also related to what we have already studied:

I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

There is a temptation we may encounter here on the earth; or we may observe this in others - I'm talking about an ambition to occupy ourselves with things which are beyond our reach. Now when I say that I'm going against the grain of modern culture. The world says, Nothing is beyond our reach.

The New Age spirit of Humanism (that has such power over the academic world and the media) sends the message that man can do anything he wants to do. The Bible teaches - there are things we shouldn't do or be concerned about; there are matters beyond our reach.

If I do not accept this, I waste a lot of time and energy laboring to find answers not intended for me ... studying, debating and bothering myself over matters that belong to God, that I don't need to know! In those things revealed to us and for us, there is enough for us to read and study and do! If I'll just limit myself to that which God has revealed, that I need to understand and believe and do - there will be no time left to try and find answers which are not revealed!!

Pulpit Commentary is right when it speaks of "...our temptation ... to long and to labor for that which is beyond our capacity, for which we were not created and endowed, which would exalt us, but which we should not adorn."

For example, folks want to know all about angels and demons. So, you bring up every passage; you present everything the Bible says; you limit yourself to what is revealed about angels and demons. But some are not satisfied; they want to know more --- so they ask probing questions, raise hypothetical matters and engage in some lengthy debate that is entirely subjective, and that has no good spiritual purpose.

On any subject - simple, complex; practical or mysterious - when you have examined everything God has revealed ... THAT'S IT; you have to leave it alone.

Now I believe all of this in Psalms 131 is connected, is related ... so let me make this observation. If I have the humility illustrated in the first part of this passage - I will not wear myself out with matters beyond my capacity. If my heart is not haughty and my eyes are not lofty ... I will not exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me!

If you ever want a passage in the Bible that forbids INTELLECTUAL ARROGANCE, this is that passage! Those who are awed and captivated by scholars; those without overall Bible knowledge, but they always bring up one or two questions that sound profound ... Those who shirk the simple principles of character taught in the Bible - and who would rather debate the deep theological issues ... They are guilty of intellectual arrogance - and it is a product of PLAIN OLD ARROGANCE.

We need to keep arrogance out of our hearts, and pride away from our eyes - so that we will not have this vain ambition for the deep and great matters that the elite debate about. If the Word of God lives within me, my heart is not haughty; my eyes not lofty and ... And do not concern myself with great matters, into which I have no access anyway.

In verse 2 ...

But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

The humility emphasized in this passage will keep us from the vain ambition that fuels intellectual arrogance; but this humility will also still and quiet the soul! Here is real contentment.

Notice, "a weaned child." The ordinary process of weaning a child will involve some disappointment or pain for the child; but that distress is temporary. Once the child is weaned there is contentment ... a product of trust in the mother. I used to read this and think about a baby in the process of being weaned, but I now see that's not it. This is about a child who has been through that process - IS NOW WEANED, and as a result of the process - there is this contentment, this satisfaction of trust.

The child knows it will still be fed. The child has learned that the mother will still be there. The weaned child illustrates contentment, satisfaction and peace - all products of trust. When I really have the humility of heart this passage describes ... I am able to trust in God so completely and so deeply - I have the contentment and peace of a weaned child.

I think that's what this is about. And I think there is not one person in the EF readership who doesn't need to read this and believe this. When I really have the humility of heart this passage describes - I am able to trust in God so completely and so deeply, I have the contentment and peace of a weaned child. If I have that - my eyes will not be haughty, and I will not concern myself with matters not revealed ... things too profound for me anyway!!

Then this ...

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

Well, we just add something else to the spirit of this passage and the practical influence of it. We add hope. Here it is again -- When I really have the humility of heart this passage describes - I am able to trust in God so completely and so deeply, I have the contentment and peace of a weaned child ... and with this disposition in me, I will not hesitate to hope in the Lord, "both now and forever more."

Finally I want to say this - What some people have, that they call "contentment" is not this kind of contentment, reflected in this passage! What some people have is a temporary respite from stress - based on something temporal, and they call it contentment. What many have is a "contentment" based on environment, social life, money, romance, popularity or sensuality --- that's nothing but a short term respite from despair, based on something earthly.

This passage speaks to real, long-lasting contentment, based on humility before God. David learned this in his experience with God, just like Paul learned it and wrote in Phil. 4:11, " I have learned ... to be content." We can learn this contentment; we can have this contentment, but it begins with the Word of God in our hearts - producing the humility described in this text.

Isaac Watts wrote a hymn based on the 131st Psalm, that was never published in musical format so far as I know; here it is ...

Humility and submission

Is there ambition in my heart?. Search, gracious God, and see; Or do I act a haughty part? Lord, I appeal to thee. I charge my thoughts, be humble still, And all my carriage mild, Content, my Father, with thy will, And quiet as a child. The patient soul, the lowly mind, Shall have a large reward: Let saints in sorrow lie resigned, And trust a faithful Lord.

Trust a faithful Lord, first, by coming to Him in obedience. Then let His word live in your heart and produce the contentment you long for.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 7.2; February 2000

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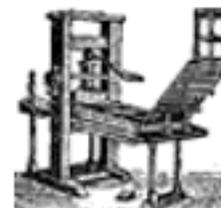


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

I Am Fearfully & Wonderfully Made

Psalm 139:13,14

God is involved in every person's life from the very beginning. By "beginning" I mean conception. Though this article is not about abortion, but rather why a human being is special, it is still true that many of the Scriptural principles we will be considering certainly speak to the topic of abortion. When a baby has been intentionally aborted, a murder has taken place.

Children are very special since they are a gift of God (Psalm 127:3). Because God is involved in every person's life from the beginning, this makes everyone very special from the beginning. Consider the text of our study, and the passage from which the title is taken; Psalm 139.

YOUR CREATION

"For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13). God made you. He formed ("created") what the text refers to as "inward parts" (Hebrew is literally "kidneys"). Don't think of what we usually think of as "kidneys" today; but rather "mind". This would be more in accordance with Jewish thought at the time David wrote this Psalm (see also Revelation 2:23). The KJV renders the word "reins" which is the archaic English word for "kidneys" and stands for the "inner man"; his or her unseen part; the substance within us that makes us what we are.

Understanding this will hopefully cause us to be responsible as good stewards. We will not use the body which God has given us in ways that would morally pollute it. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

God wove you. Like a tapestry, each of us is a complex creature (Exodus 26:36). All of our parts work together; each with a different job to do and all depending on the other parts (1 Corinthians 12:14-18). God works with the skill that confounds man. We recall the first creation which began it all (Genesis 2:7;22; 1:27). When God formed that initial human pair, He skillfully added mechanisms which would operate on the basis of natural law so that they would be able to re-create themselves. The Psalmist correctly identifies God as the Master Worker who is the source of our origin.

This should elicit praise and thanksgiving from our hearts (Psalm 139:14). We are "fearfully" (awe) and "wonderfully" (to distinguish) made. Each of us are unique in many ways, but also similar in many; each an original masterpiece of the Creator. Don't deny this aspect of your identity (too many have done so). God can use your special abilities (Palm 139:16); He has a purpose for you!

YOU BEGAN PURE & UNDEFILED

Jesus' commended little children for some of the qualities they are born with. (Matthew 18:3; 19:14). There was a time early in our lives when we were in a state of innocence as well. But the day came when we became accountable for our actions and lost our innocence. Transgressing God's law defiles us and places us in opposition to God (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 2:1-3).

Yet, such a one still belongs to God and God still loves the sinner - (Ephesians 2:4-6). He wants you to be pure so that He might reward you in the ages to come (Ephesians 2:7). It is time to say "yes" to God and "no" to sin. Seek purity in Christ (1 Peter 4:2; 2:1-3).

GOD THINKS ABOUT YOU

So precious (weighty) are the thoughts of God (Psalm 139:17,18). They are vast and far beyond us (Romans 11:33-36). God is intensely interested in our salvation.

Because of this, God has provided redemption in His Son, Jesus (John 3:16). This was in accordance with His plan from before the beginning (Ephesians 3:11-13). When sin entered the world, God was right there, and along with announcing the consequences of sin He also announced His plan to undo what Satan had done and remedy the situation which would have otherwise been hopeless (Genesis 3:15).

God has not abandoned man; man has abandoned God. But some have the wisdom to recognize that it is we who need God; His love and care and fellowship before we can truly be happy. We are His offspring! (Acts 17:24-28). Some have abandoned our Father and have gone to live with another (John 8:43-45). Not many actually call Satan "Dad", but Jesus says that is what Satan becomes to those who refuse to hear Him. If you allow the world to dictate your morality, your religion, your speech, your dress, your conduct, then say "hello" to your new dad, according to Jesus; "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father..." (John 8:44).

But we all know who our real Father is, don't we? (Hebrews 12:9). We know from whom our spirits come; who loves us; to whom we owe our submission. We are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made" and it is time we show our appreciation to the Father for what He has done for us, and the hope of eternal life which He offers us at so great a cost to Himself.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 6.8; August 1999

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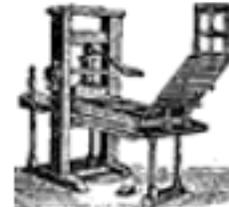


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Solomon on Money

(Part One)

Proverbs

THE PRESENCE OF MONEY IN our lives is natural and constant. Like time, oxygen or gravity, money is a part of reality; a principle of life that cannot be escaped. Even in very simple cultures, where personal and business transactions were carried on through a system of barter, the concept of money was present - the wampum beads of the Indians served the same purpose as the currency in our wallets today.

As a complete guide for life, the Word of God gives instructions in all areas, including the wise use of money. Indeed, the Bible includes more than most of us realize about money - how to use it, how not to use it, the proper attitude toward it. The Book of Proverbs is a very practical guide in matters pertaining to life. Therein we are encouraged to "make plans by seeking advice" (20:18). We will therefore look at some advice in the area of handling money from this Old Testament Book of Wisdom.

THINKING

The first step in any worthy endeavor is to establish proper "thinking". We certainly need proper thinking when it comes to handling money. The Bible may cause us to re-think some long held notions about money and how we use it.

Modern man usually does not think of God when he considers possible sources of wealth. However, the Bible says, "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth" (10:22). Modern man generally looks to money to provide security for himself and his family. Money, however, cannot provide the security that man needs in the spiritual, eternal realm. "He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge" (14:26). "Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death" (11:4). The worth of possessions, principles and people cannot be measured in terms of their monetary value. Again the wise man says, "Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all" (22:2).

Materialistic thinking views the attainment of money worth any sacrifice. Yet, "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife" (17:1). "Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse" (28:6). There are many things in life worth more

than money. We must, therefore, allow God's Word to mold our thinking when it comes to money lest we become deceived by the foolishness around us.

EARNING

God is the ultimate source of wealth, but He does not reward the lazy. We must work for a living. The hobo once sung about the "big rock candy mountains", where "they hung the jerk who invented work", but in the real world work is a blessing from God. "He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment" (12:11). "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (14:23).

Even though the Spirit says, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children" (13:22), it also warns about money which is inherited rather than earned, "An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning will not be blessed at the end" (20:21).

The book of Proverbs often condemns the " sluggard" and his laziness. "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in the summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son" (10:4,5). See also 6:9-111; 13:4; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4,13; 21:25,26; 22:13; 24:20-34; 26:13-17

Some people work diligently (as the wise man instructs -12:24), yet for the wrong motive. Their purpose is to get rich and spend their lives in the selfish pursuit of luxury and leisure. This idea is not highly spoken of either. "A greedy man brings trouble to his family" (15:27). "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered" (21:13). "It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one's own honor" (25:27). If you pursue plans that include the obtaining of great sums of money without diligent labor, or with selfish intentions God will not be your life long companion.

BORROWING & LENDING

Our culture has deeply ingrained ideas about borrowing and lending - ideas that are certainly not reflected in the Bible. For example, borrowing is accepted as a necessary and normal part of everyday life. Our news sources tell us that a strong economy is one characterized by more spending and less saving. The use of credit cards to extend spending capacity is seen as a positive sign of confidence in the economy. An increase in the savings rate among Americans is always interpreted as the sign of weakness motivated by fear and selfishness. Furthermore, since the events of 911 the purchase of consumer goods on credit has been advertised as almost a patriotic duty. How many people purchased a new car recently, putting their families in big time debt, then walked away from the deal with the feeling that they had just helped defeat the British at Saratoga (or the Taliban at Kandahar)?

The Bible has a different perspective on debt. No where in either the Old or New Testaments is borrowing money ever recommended or even spoken of in positive terms. It is always described as unwise. The practice of lending money is viewed similarly. "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (22:7). If you have contracted a debt to some individual or institution, you have placed yourself in slavery to them. "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have struck hands in pledge for another . . . then do this, my son, to free yourself . . . go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor! Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids.

Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler" (6:1-5). If you are in debt or have co-signed for someone else's debt take the wise man's advise and free yourself as quickly as a gazelle running from the jaws of the hungry lion.

When it comes to the use of credit cards consult the wise advise (with editorial comment) given in Proverbs 23:1-3:

"When you sit to dine (i.e. walk into a department store and observe the fine things laid out on the tables) with a ruler (i.e. Visa, MC, Penny's , Lazarus, etc), note well what is before you (i.e. things, neat things that you just HAVE to have), and put a knife to your throat (i.e. scissors to the credit card) if you are given to gluttony (i.e. in the habit of buying things you can't afford. Don't fool yourself. If you could afford the stuff you would not be using a credit card! And just because you can afford a minimum monthly payment does not mean you can afford it!). Do not crave his delicacies (i.e. the clothes, and other stuff that will make everyone say WOW), for that food is deceptive" (i.e. it will cost a lot more and take a much longer time to pay for than you realize.)

Don't allow your attitude toward the borrowing and lending of money conform to the world. What the world accepts as normal is not always good. Normal people are in debt and stay in debt most of their lives. God wants better than that for His children.

(To Be Continued Next Issue)

By Ed Barnes
From Expository Files 14.5; May 2007

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Solomon on Money

(Part 2 of 3)

Proverbs

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS HAS much to say about the wise use of money. In our previous article we learned from the wisdom of Solomon concerning our THINKING about money, the responsibility of EARNING money and the practice of BORROWING and LENDING money. We may have recognized a need to adjust our attitude about money in these areas in order to conform to Biblical principles. This week we will continue our study as we observe a few more points of Divine wisdom from the Book of Proverbs pertaining to how we use money.

SPENDING

There is nothing wrong with spending money. There is nothing wrong with spending a-lot of money. However, there may be something wrong with HOW we are spending money. For example, if we are neglecting to purchase or invest in things that we need in order to spend money on things we don't need, then we are spending foolishly. Wisdom and self-discipline are needed in this area. The wise man of Proverbs tells us, "He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame" (13:18). Wise spending is the result of thinking and planning ahead, i.e. budgeting, However, many people throw discipline out the window when spending money. The only rule is "how much can I beg, borrow and steal" then we proceed to spend until all resources are used up. Again we hear from Proverbs, "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has" (21:20). If we have trouble controlling our spending habits Solomon tells us to take drastic measures, ". . . and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony" (23:2). I suppose gluttony can apply to our consumption of things as well as food.

WHY we spend money can be as much of a problem as HOW we spend. Spending for many people is not just a matter of deciding what is needed, then going out and finding that item at the lowest cost. Modern shopping is about fulfilling emotional needs. We have a disease called "stuffitis" and it is treated with heavy doses of spending. People go out to the malls and spend because it make them feel good. For many, shopping thus becomes a sort of confidence builder. There is a certain pretentiousness involved in the shopping habits of people in our materialistic culture; a pretentiousness that is

condemned. Note the following: "Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant, than pretend to be somebody and have no food" (12:9). "One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth" (13:7). We should not depend on spending to bolster a false confidence. Exercising self-discipline and bringing our spending habits under the control of God will produce a true confidence that spending cannot duplicate. Proverbs 3:26 states "for the Lord will be your confidence"

SAVING

A discussion about spending is also a discussion about saving. Uncontrolled spending will undermine saving, whereas a disciplined savings plan will control spending. I once heard about an old man who preached for some denominational church. He had maintained a very modest income during all the years of his preaching life but retired with more than two million dollars in the bank. How did he do it? By saving a little at a time, consistently over many years. The wisdom of such discipline is reflected in Proverbs 13:11, which states: "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow." Verse 18 of the same chapter says, "He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame . . ."

The principle of compound interest working together with the lifelong habit of saving a little each week will provide all the savings you will ever need, not only in retirement, but also for all the material possessions a reasonable person would ever need. However, you are not likely to learn these common sense principles in high school or college business classes. The financial wisdom taught by the world is based on making a high annual income, the crafty use of credit and the benefits of government hand-out programs. Some folks sell little kits that teach the concept of "get rich quick". You see such offerings advertised on radio and TV (not to mention telephone poles at intersections). But such will never come close to providing for you financially like the application of the principles found in the Bible. Our strong recommendation is that you go with God's wisdom. Note the following passages from the wisdom of Solomon: "The plans of the diligent lead to profit, as surely as haste leads to poverty" (21:5). "The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor" (10:15). "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has" (21:20). All these passages speak of the wisdom of saving.

(Series to be concluded in August)

By Edward C. Barnes
From Expository Files 14.6; June 2007

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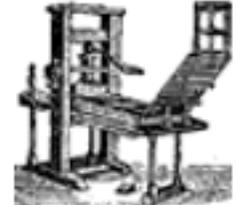
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Solomon on Money

(Part 3 of 3)

Proverbs

Part 3 of 3 - (see April and May issues for part 1 and 2)

THIS IS OUR THIRD AND FINAL article on the subject of money. We have been consulting the sage advice given in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. In our first article we learned from the wisdom of Solomon concerning our THINKING about money, and the practice of BORROWING and LENDING money. Last time we looked at some problems we have in the area of SPENDING money as well as the necessity of SAVING money. Today we will conclude our study by consulting God's wisdom with regard to GIVING, ENTERPRISING (i.e. business practices), LOVING and MANAGING money.

GIVING

Giving as we should involves the two-fold responsibility of duty toward God and benevolence toward others. The Book of Proverbs addresses both areas. In Proverbs 3:9 the wise man instructs, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of your crops. . ."

The Old Testament often speaks of tithing. The practice of giving a tenth of one's income or property as an offering to God was an ancient practice found among many nations of the ancient world. The practice extends into Hebrew history before the time of the Mosaic Law. The first recorded instance occurs in Genesis 14:17-20 with Abraham giving to Melchizedek a tithe of all the goods he had obtained in battle. The law of Moses prescribed tithing in some detail (Lev 27:30-32; Num 18:21-32; Deut 26:12-150). The principle of giving of one's best was an important part of the Old Testament law concerning tithing. Proverbs 3:9 makes mention of the "firstfruits" of your crops, not the leftovers.

Giving to others was also commanded in the Old Law. Leviticus 19:9,10 instructs the Israelites to leave grain in their fields during harvest that the poor might gather the gleanings. Proverbs 14:21 says, ". . . blessed is he who is kind to the needy." Also in 3:27: "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act," and in 22:9: "A generous man . . . shares his food with the poor."

A third principle of giving taught in Proverbs is that God will bless those who are benevolent. Proverbs 19:17 states: "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done." Many other proverbs state the same truth that the making of money and the owning of property and material goods is not just for our own enjoyment. We must learn the virtue of sharing with God and others (see also Eph 4:28).

ENTERPRISING

The Lord has a lot to say to the business man (or woman) in the Book of Proverbs. For example, If you are in business with the public your dealings must be honest. "Differing weights and differing measures - the Lord detests them both" (20:10). Again, "A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare" (21:6).

One must also be kind in business. "He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth . . . comes to poverty" (22:16). There is much oppression of the poor in our society. State lottery's, gambling casinos and the like are a plague on the poor. Many in impoverished neighborhoods look to the lottery as their retirement program. Credit card companies, banks, and many high ticket product (autos, homes, etc) manufacturers lure the public into time payments which they cannot afford but foolishly take advantage of, causing many to go into debt and eventual bankruptcy. Yes, there are a lot of unscrupulous business practices that a Christian should have no part in, many of which are an accepted part of otherwise well established and legitimate businesses.

The Book of Proverbs also has something to say to the greedy individual who is obsessed with making money to the neglect of other, more important matters. Proverbs 15:16 states, "Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil." Also, "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint" (23:4).

LOVING

The Book of Proverbs speaks of many things that we should love, or at least be greatly concerned with -- money is not one of them. Righteousness is to be sought after: "Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death" (11:4). "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf" (11:28). Honest concern about the welfare of others rather than how much money is at stake in any given situation is also a matter addressed by the wise man: "Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies; for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. 'Eat and drink' he says to you, but his heart is not with you" (23:6-7). The principle of moderation in material things is an important virtue: ". . . Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread" (30:8). Finally, "a good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold" (22:1)

MANAGING

The last point in our discussion concerning Solomon's advise on the wise use of money is that we must all be wise managers of what God has given to us. We spoke earlier about the financial institutions in our land taking advantage of people's ignorance of the how the money game is played. Now is it time to issue a warning that it is our personal responsibility to learn the facts and take precautions to avoid being taken advantage of. Note the instructions of Proverbs 5:7-10 as wisdom address us: "Listen then, my

sons, listen to me; lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth, and your toil enrich another man's house." Diligence is recommended in this area: "The sluggard craves and gets nothing but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied" (13:4).

All of these divinely given instructions will lead us to responsible money handling habits and to the financial security that God gives as a blessing to those who follow his will in this area.

By Edward C. Barnes
From Expository Files 14.8; August 2007

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Fear of the Lord

Proverbs 1:7

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

This is one of the premises forming the foundation of the book of Proverbs (Prov. 1:7, New King James).

Throughout Proverbs and in the Bible at large, God tells us that our basic disposition of mind or attitude is where everything begins. Proverbs 4:23 expresses the same premise: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."

In the New Testament, Jesus echoes this in Matt. 15:18,19 where He shows that sinful behaviors originate in sinful thinking; He specifies adultery, fornication, stealing, dishonesty and blasphemy. He declared that these things come "from the heart." So in Proverbs, in the teaching of Christ, and throughout Scripture this premise cannot be missed: Our basic disposition of mind or attitude is where everything (good behavior and bad) begins.

Since this is so, there is a practical component I must acknowledge: If I will get my heart right with God, and maintain that disposition of heart, that action on my part will move me in the right direction and prompt good character and behavior. If there is, in my heart, a healthy fear and respect toward God, that is the beginning of a good life of right knowledge and right behavior. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

Let's explore this disposition of heart further. What is the fear of the Lord?

It is not just a feeling of terror, as described in Romans 8:15 ("For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'"). This is a spirit of bondage that generates fear. This kind of fear is not the beginning of knowledge. The fear of the Lord isn't a timid, cowardly spirit, as described in 2 Tim. 1:7. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (Note: The word "fear" in the Bible must always be understood in view of the context in which it occurs. You cannot, therefore, assume a single definition or significance that applies "across the board." You must carefully consider the context in order to assign the proper meaning to the word. It is one of those words that is context sensitive. So, the "fear" we are concerned with in Prov. 1:7 is not identical to the "fear" of Rom. 8:15 or 2 Tim. 1:7.)

In Proverbs 1:7...

The fear of the Lord is an attitude of respect toward God, which includes a healthy dread of displeasing Him. The fear of the Lord is about reverence toward God, respect for Him, love and appreciation, holding Him and His beloved Son in high esteem. And this is the attitude necessary in order for us to know and do what's right!

So if I want knowledge -- I must have this attitude! If I want to know and do what's right before God; if I want to learn to make ethical and moral distinctions to please God - this attitude must find residence in my heart: The fear of the Lord.

The reason many do not take God's Word seriously is, they do not have this attitude. They have no foundation of respect for God in their hearts. As a result of the absence of this kind of fear, they read or hear God's commandments and react: "I don't want to do that . . . I don't see anything wrong with this . . . I don't think I'm going to hell if I do this or neglect that!!" Without the fear of the Lord, there is no reason (in their hearts) to respect Him and obey Him. Faithful service to God and obedience to Christ is rooted in the FEAR OF THE LORD.

Parents need to begin instilling this good influence in their children as soon as influences are possible! Preachers need to preach lessons which are designed to encourage, foster and nurture this fear of the Lord. Elders need to have this fear in their own lives and lead others to this disposition of heart. And when we set about the task of teaching someone what to do to be saved, we need to illustrate, instruct and influence our students in this good direction.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

Throughout the rest of Proverbs, the inspired writer shows that this basic attitude toward God GETS GOOD RESULTS! Notice:

THE FEAR OF THE LORD . .

causes us to depart from evil, Prov. 3:7.

causes us to hate evil, Prov. 8:13.

prolongs our days, Prov. 10:27.

inspired confidence, Prov. 14:26.

affords great contentment, Prov. 15:16.

keeps the heart, Prov. 23:17.

strengthens us against unstable companions, Prov. 24:21.

What is your attitude toward God?

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 4.9; September 1997

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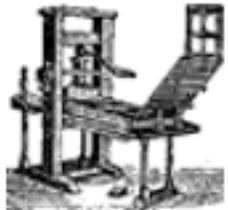
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Trust In The Lord

Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Much of the wisdom of Proverbs is directed to the young man. The oft repeated "my son" phrase sets the context for what follows. The picture is of a father offering wise advice to the son. The father warns about those things in life such as wine, sensual pleasure, and evil companions that can hinder the boy from the desired goals. In the passage above he points him toward the Lord.

Actually, the truths taught here would be useful for one at any stage of life and for one of any gender. However, life is especially frightening to that young boy who is trying to become a man. The uncertainties of the future often overwhelm him. During this time he is receiving advice from worldly friends. So, son here is the secret to ultimate success.

"Trust in the Lord". Do not place your trust in evil companions (Proverbs 1:10), nor precious possessions (Proverbs 1:13), nor brute power (Proverbs 1:11, for they lead to heartache. Do not look on the wine for it is a mocker (Proverbs 23:29-35). Keep yourself far from the harlot (Proverbs 5:3-11) for she will lead to death. Do not trust in these tangible objects, but believe in the invisible, but living God!

"With all of your heart" - Yield the decisions of life to him - your marriage and your career. Give God all of your heart. Do not withhold any area of your life from the Lord. Do not compromise with God by saying "Well I'll give up my bad friends, but keep my wine." Make a bold and daring move and give your all to the Lord.

"Lean not on your own understanding". Do not be arrogant for the Lord knows best. Listen to your mother and your father - the voice of experience. (Proverbs 1:8) You are not wise enough to be your own guide.

In all your ways acknowledge Him and He Will direct your paths. My son, God is there for you and your welfare. He will help you during those challenging times and through all of the storms. He will help you to make the right decisions and lead you in the right way. God can be your security and help you to face any challenge!

What a great motto for life! Live by it!

By George Slover
From Expository Files 12.3; March 2005

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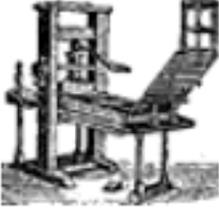
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"Do Not Enter"

Proverbs 4:14-19

I was trying to navigate a rental car through the traffic lanes at the Indianapolis Airport a few months ago. A fraction of a second after my wife's verbal warning, I passed by a sign that said "Do Not Enter." We were now in danger because I entered. Using navigation skills unavailable earlier, I cautiously steered the car into the right lane. The sign meant something; it was intended to direct drivers to safety and away from the danger of oncoming vehicles.

God's word should be carefully read and followed. It is intended to direct us to the safety of His care and keeping, and away from the danger of "the way of evil." One instance of this is Proverbs 4:14-19.

14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil.

15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on.

16 For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence.

18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.

One prominent issue in the book of Proverbs is influence; in particular, associating with people who have the capacity and desire to lead us away from safety and into the danger of "the wicked." This passage is concerned with this issue of life - the temptations and seductions that can come our way through people who live without regard to God's wisdom. And this passage begins with a prohibition: Do Not Enter, or as the young people might express it: Don't Go There.

People who are dedicated to their own selfish interests, who aspire to nothing godly and who have no regard for the truth are walking down a pathway we must determine to avoid. And to emphasize this the passage says, with some alarm and urgency: "Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on." (This is similar to my wife's verbal warning mentioned above.) The wisdom we need in life we will not get in the way of evil or the path of the wicked. As we "drive" through the traffic of life, we need to watch carefully. God has placed these signs for our benefit: Do Not Enter.

What kind of people occupy this pathway? "For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall." All of us know people and we are associated with people who do not share our faith; are not members of the Lord's church, and who may do some things we do not approve of. In this passage, these people do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their

sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall! These are people determined to do evil; determined to get others to do evil. The warning sign says Do not enter.

Who are these people? "For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence." Their menu is wickedness and violence. They consume and they live on wickedness and violence. So avoid them -- turn away from them. Do not enter.

If I should avoid association with these people and refuse to enter in their path, who should I associate with? What pathway should I seek? "The path of the just is the like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble." Just as dark as the way of the wicked is - the path of the just is light, "like the shining sun." This contrast is designed to help us distinguish between the path of the just and the way of the wicked. The message regarding the way of the wicked is simple: Do not enter. Give heed to the warning before you make a wrong turn.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 8.2; February 2001

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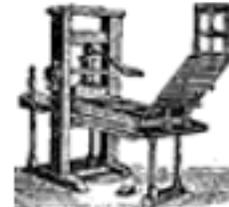


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"Suretiship"

Proverbs 6:1-5 and 11:15

I have a useful book of essays on Proverbs written by William Arnot, reprinted twice by Kregel Publications, but originally published in 1884. Modern readers may find his style distracting but there is substance in his teaching. Of particular insight, Arnot commented at some length on the subject of what he called "suretiship" based on the teachings of Prov. 6:1-5 and 11:15. Before I relate his observations, here are the passages along with some of my comments:

Prov. 6:1-5

1 My son, if you become surety for your friend,
If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger,
2 You are snared by the words of your mouth;
You are taken by the words of your mouth.
3 So do this, my son, and deliver yourself;
For you have come into the hand of your friend:
Go and humble yourself;
Plead with your friend.
4 Give no sleep to your eyes,
Nor slumber to your eyelids.
5 Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,
And like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

Prov. 11:15

15 He who is surety for a stranger will suffer,
But one who hates being surety is secure.

Becoming "surety" is a personal practice we might call "co-signing." This teaching does not forbid helping someone in this way, but it sends a warning against impulsive commitments. We must be careful what we agree to, what we promise.

Have you ever made a promise you were not able to keep? Have you ever made a commitment with good intentions to help someone, and the whole deal turned bad on you? Most of us have been at this place in life - where we quickly entered into a deal that turned bad ... then we had the challenge of

figuring out an appropriate way to extricate ourselves from the matter. That's what this passage is about - the impulsive, quick decisions we may make with good intentions to help someone ... the deal goes bad - and we must find a way to resolve the problem. We cannot just walk away from a promise.

We may be tempted to get ourselves out of the problem, the same way we got in - through an act of impulse. This passage does not recommend an act of impulse - followed by another! This passage teaches us to follow an open, honest, humble approach to the problem: "Go and humble yourself; Plead with your friend." You must not just walk away from a promise - you must seek an honorable resolution in order to deliver yourself. The teaching here is not - just forget it and go to sleep. The teaching is - to humble yourself and plead with your friend. Impulse go you into this trouble - care, humility and skill must be exercised to deliver yourself.

Back to Arnot, whose work on Proverbs was published in 1884 (England), he refers to this teaching as a warning against "rash suretiship." I've taken some liberty to paraphrase his comments below; I set this off in quotation marks since there is no change in the essence of his thoughts:

"Rash suretiship, and the ruin that follows it, seem to have been common in those days, as well as our own. The economy of ancient times was small, in comparison with the vast system of exchange which now compasses the whole world... but the same vices that we lament marred it, and the same righteousness that we desire would have healed its' ailments...

"In those primitive times, it seems, as in our own, some men desired to get faster forward in the world than their circumstances legitimately permitted. They were determined to attain high financial status, although they had noting to stand on. Their ambition fretted at the slow and vulgar method of climbing up by patient industry; they would ascend by a bound. They must get a neighbor to provide security for them, that they may get the use of money which is not their own. They will throw for a fortune to themselves at another's risk.

"There were also others, it appears, so simple as to become surety for the adventurers, perhaps because they could not command enough of courage to refuse a friend, although they thereby cast into a lottery the home and the food of their own families. The warning does not discourage considerate kindness in bearing a deserving man over a temporary pressure. When you have ascertained the character of the person, and measured the amount of his need; when you have balanced your own responsibilities and accounts, and discovered that they have buoyancy sufficient to bear both yourself and your brother over the strait, then do a brother's turn, and enjoy a brother's love and the approval of God. No precept of the Bible demands that we should harden our hearts against the claims of the needy. The Bible permits and requires more of kindness to our brother than we have ever shown him yet; but it does not allow us to do a certain substantial evil in risk, for the sake of a distant shadowy good.

"It condemns utterly the rash engagements which, under pretence of doing a kindness to one, inflicts injustice on a hundred. Righteousness, in all times, and all circumstances, reclaims against the blind effort which, for the sake of supporting a tottering fabric, incurs the risk of bringing your own house down about your ears, and crushing beneath its ruins many innocent victims."

(Based on comments by William Arnot, STUDIES IN PROVERBS: Laws From Heaven For Life On Earth, Kregel Publications, 1978, pages 208-209).

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 8.3; March 2001

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The Way That Seems Right

Proverbs 14:12

The Bible urges us to develop such virtues as RESPONSIBILITY, HONESTY, LOYALTY, FAITHFULNESS AND LOVE. Whether you are reading the teachings of Christ, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the epistles, the writings of Old Testament prophets or the wisdom of Proverbs, you are trained in these and other virtues. The Bible is the instruction manual for human life.

But, not only does the Bible impart positive instruction in virtues and their cultivation, ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE ... THERE ARE STATEMENTS DESIGNED TO MAKE US AWARE OF POTENTIAL DANGER. Proverbial statements; lengthy illustrations, and warning signs --- designed and given, to awaken us to certain dangers.

We are often informed of wrong choices, and told of the inevitable consequences. And this is the kind of statement we shall study in this article, from Proverbs 14:12 ---> "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." This is repeated later, in Prov. 16:25 - "THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO A MAN, BUT ITS END IS THE WAY OF DEATH."

This is one of the most familiar passages, often quoted from the book of Proverbs. I'm pretty sure that most of you have heard this passage before ... But, HOW OFTEN DO WE TAKE THE TIME TO STUDY IT ... HAVE WE EVER JUST SAT DOWN WITH THIS PASSAGE ... TO STUDY WHAT IT MEANS, AND THINK OF ALL THE IMPLICATIONS INVOLVED ?? "THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO A MAN, BUT ITS END IS THE WAY OF DEATH."

There are four observations I want to make, pertaining to this verse.

One:
IF I MAY BEGIN ON A VERY SIMPLE LEVEL, MY FIRST POINT IS -- SOME THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM!!

Appearances and first impressions are not always accurate! Two illustrations will help us think about this:

In the hard winter months in Kansas (where I once lived) -- accidents sometimes happen, when small children venture out onto the thin ice of a frozen pond. They cannot see beyond the thin layer of ice. It appears to be a strong surface, and they think it will hold them But in the end, there is disaster! Some things are not what they seem.

Another example --- the sparkling, cool, clear water in a mountain stream **MAY BE TOXIC AND FATAL**. It may look all right, but be poison. It may appear, to the naked eye to be clear, clean, transparent and pure water ... but actually be full of deadly poison. Some things are not what they seem!

And this bit of truth is something we must bear in mind, as touching morals and religion. Some form of entertainment may seem to be right; it may appear to be right but, upon further investigation, **IT TURNS OUT TO BE DETRIMENTAL OR HARMFUL**.

A religious practice may have the endorsement and approval of the majority all the appearances may lend themselves to acceptance but, when you really study the matter and check the Scriptures, **IT TURNS OUT TO BE WRONG**. Some things are not what they seem. And this applies to doctrines, moral issues, religious institutions, religious personalities and religious ideas or interpretations of Scripture. Some things are not what they seem.

Some pathway may look like a smooth garden-path, winding among flower-beds; it may be attractive, appealing and agreeable. But - in the end, it's the way of death! The way leading to destruction is usually not accompanied by **A HUGE NEON SIGN** that identifies it as "**THE WAY OF DEATH**." Some things are not what they seem. **SO, LET US NOT BE HASTY OR IMPULSIVE!** Let us act like Christians using the Word of God to gain insight and make right decisions! Let us look beyond appearances, as far as we can! Let us study deeper going beyond the first impressions. Let us try to find out, **FOR SURE**, that which is good. "Test all things; hold fast what is good," (2 Thess. 5:21). "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God ... because many false prophets have gone out into the world," (1 Jno. 4:1). **FOR**, "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Two:
MAN IS NOT THE HIGHEST SURVEYOR OF LIFE!

In our society, there are the philosophies of **HUMANISM** and **SUBJECTIVISM** and these approaches have in common, **ONE MAIN FALLACY ---->**
THESE APPROACHES MAKE MAN THE HIGHEST SURVEYOR OF LIFE. Man is set up as the highest surveyor of life; the measure of all things! The problem with this is --- that which seems right to a man, may turn out to be "the way of death!" For, "there is a way that seems right **TO A MAN**, but its end is the way of death!" Man is not the highest surveyor of life!

Just compare **THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE WITH THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE**.

Man sees the appearance ... God can see beyond the appearances.

Man has a limited knowledge of the past ... God has a perfect view of the past.

Man has limited knowledge of the future ... God has what the Bible calls "foreknowledge!"

Man can be affected by prejudice, selfishness, ulterior motives ... God is perfectly impartial and just in all His judgments.

Man can be blinded by passion and self-will ... Man can be tempted ... **THESE THINGS DO NOT HAPPEN TO GOD !! NOW, WHO HAS THE BETTER VIEW OF THINGS? You see, there is A HIGHER JUDGE ... FAR ABOVE MAN !**

When we compare **THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE** with **THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE** ...it becomes clear that **THERE IS A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD AND MAN**. Isa 31:3 says -- "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God!" When the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, he was instructed to say to the people: "You have not distinguished between the holy and the unholy," (Ezek. 22:26). It must be clear to us --- that **MAN IS NOT THE HIGHEST SURVEYOR OF LIFE**. So, Jer. 10:23 says ---> **IT IS NOT IN MAN THAT WALKETH, TO DIRECT HIS OWN STEPS**. And -- this verse says: "**THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO A MAN, BUT ITS END IS THE WAY OF DEATH.**"

Three:
SINCERITY DOESN'T STOP CONSEQUENCES.

You may be completely convinced that a certain thing is right; you may believe it with all your heart, sincerely having no doubt that this thing is correct ---> **BUT IF THIS THING IS A MISTAKE, WITH HORRIBLE CONSEQUENCES ... YOUR SINCERITY AND CERTAINTY WILL NOT STOP THE CONSEQUENCES**. Your opinion that the path is right does not make it right. Your sincerity in that erroneous opinion does not exempt you from the consequences!

You see, there is an undeviating connection between causes and their effects; a connection that isn't broken by one's sincerity! Two illustrations will help us study this point:

1. Suppose you invest your money in some company. You investigate, and do all kinds of research. You talk to people you know; you see that company turn over vast amounts of money, as they do business from day to day. Everything looks good, so you invest your money in the company. Doesn't even seem to be a risk! But rather, a carefully calculated venture, whereby you are bound to make money. You throw in several thousand dollars under **THE SINCERE BELIEF** that you'll make money. **THEN --** several unforeseen factors enter in; some eventualities occur that you couldn't foresee and you loose it all! You were sincere! You really thought this was a sure thing but you lost everything you put in. You see - how sincerity doesn't stop consequences !!

2. A man contracts and pays for a ship to be built. He wants top quality material, expert workmanship and **HE WANTS A FINISHED PRODUCT WITH ALL THE SAFETY FEATURES KNOWN TO THE**

INDUSTRY. So - he hires a shipbuilder, and the vessel is delivered in due time. This man **BELIEVES SINCERELY**, that this is a sea-worthy vehicle --- so, he loads up his family, and out to sea they go. Not long after he embarks on the journey, a treacherous storm comes in And, due to human error unknown to this sailor ... the ship and its' precious cargo begins to sink! **QUESTION --->** Will this man's sincerity keep the ship afloat ?? He honestly and sincerely believed the ship was sea-worthy but **SINCERITY DOESN'T STOP CONSEQUENCES !!** "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." And so it is - in morals and religion!

Let's identify a particular way as "pathway X." This could be a moral philosophy, a religious doctrine, a religious system ... or, some practice ... project, relationship. We'll call it, "pathway X." Now -- "PATHWAY X" is wrong; it is sinful in the sight of God, and some terrible consequences are attached to it! You enter into "pathway X." You are not actively seeking your own destruction ... you really think this is the way to go! You are honest and sincere, in your decision to go this way. Question: **WILL YOUR SINCERITY EXEMPT YOU FROM THESE CONSEQUENCES ??** Sincerity doesn't stop consequences! Your belief that the path is right **DOES NOT MAKE IT RIGHT.** Your sincerity in that erroneous belief does not exempt you from the consequences. So, let us take no comfort in the sincerity we may have, with respect to some questionable path we have taken !!

I think there are people --- who are walking down a pathway **THEY ARE NOT CERTAIN OF ...** When that uncertainty or doubt enters their minds, they immediately dismiss those thoughts ... saying to themselves: "**BUT, I'M SINCERE!**" My friend -- if you are walking down the wrong path; if you are going in the wrong direction don't be comforted by your sincerity. Because, **SINCERITY DOESN'T STOP CONSEQUENCES !!** There is a law, that effects follow causes, and sincerity doesn't cancel the law!

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." **THE FACT THAT IT SEEMS RIGHT DOESN'T CANCEL THE DEATH AT THE END OF THE PATH !!**

Four: **A WRONG CHOICE CAN LEAD TO DEATH !!**

This is so, in respect to physical death. In driving an automobile -- a wrong choice can lead to death. Surely we have learned, in regard to drugs and alcohol, **A WRONG CHOICE CAN LEAD TO DEATH.** Those involved in the sin of homosexuality **OUGHT TO BE GETTING THE MESSAGE TOO ---** a wrong choice can lead to death.

But, **THERE IS ANOTHER KIND OF DEATH ...** the Bible speaks of **SPIRITUAL DEATH.** In Ephesians chapter two -- being "dead in trespasses and sins," and **EVENTUALLY** the "second death" of fire and brimstone - in Rev. 21:8. That passage says: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Now - look at that verse a moment. In regard to those in this verse, who are called **COWARDLY --->**

how did they become "cowardly?" **THEY CHOSE TO LIVE THAT WAY ...** and that choice eventuates in the second death. When we look at Rev. 21:8 -- we need to look at it as **A VARIETY OF WRONG CHOICES, WHICH LEAD TO THE SECOND DEATH.** "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Conclusion:

I've made four observations, in reference to a familiar passage:

1. Some things are not what they seem.
2. Man is not the highest surveyor of life.
3. Sincerity doesn't stop consequences.
4. A wrong choice can lead to death.

Now, in view of these things --- **WHAT OUGHT WE TO DO ??** If some things are not what they seem ... If man is not the highest surveyor of life ... If sincerity doesn't stop consequences ... If a wrong choice can lead to death ... **WHAT OUGHT WE TO DO ??** We ought to be sure of every step we take. We may be sincere ... but wrong. So, we need to be sure we are right!! And, if we have a copy of God's Word, and we rightly divide it and apply it, we can!

We cannot depend upon what **SEEMS RIGHT TO MAN.** We must place our trust in **WHAT IS RIGHT, TO GOD.** For, "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Now -- **WHAT PATHWAY ARE YOU FOLLOWING TODAY ??** Are you sure that pathway is right?? There is a way that is right, and cannot be wrong. There is a pathway, that leads to all the spiritual blessings you need ... A road that leads to heaven.

Jesus said, **"I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, EXCEPT THROUGH ME,"** (Jno. 14:6). Examine the pathway you are on now, and make a change if you need to!

By Warren E. Berkley
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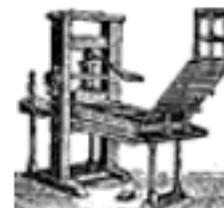


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"Wine Is A Mocker"

Proverbs 20:1

According to Proverbs 20:1, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." Wine and strong drink turn men into mockers and brawlers. Those who are under their influence scoff at what is holy, reject correction, ridicule the serious. Furthermore, they are "no longer masters of themselves or restrained by the laws of morality or decency" (The Pulpit Commentary,[1950; rpt Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958] vol. 9, p. 883) The Justice Department recently issued a report which beautifully illustrates the truth of this Proverb.

According to an Associated Press article in The Boston Globe ("Study Links Alcohol To Many Violent Crimes,"6 April 1998, p. A8, col. 5-6), the Justice Department says that "alcohol may be a factor in nearly 40 percent of violent crimes." What's more alcohol is a big "factor in violence by a variety of intimates - a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend ... Victims of spousal violence said three-fourths of their attackers used alcohol." In addition to this, "of the 5.3 million adult offenders in prison, jail, or on parole or probation in 1996, 36 percent reported that they had been drinking at the time of the offense for which they were convicted" And, by the way, "one in five victims of alcohol-related violence reports a financial loss." When injury occurred, the average out-of-pocket medical expense was \$1,500." As a whole, each year the total financial loss to victims who suffered in alcohol-related violence is "more than \$400 million."

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler," if you don't believe this take a tour of the local prisons. If you still don't believe, search out and find one of the many shelters from battered wives and children and think about the part that booze played in evicting these poor souls from their homes and in causing them to live in fear of the ones who ought to love them. If, after this, you remain unconvinced ... then it may be that you are beyond remedy.

"Wine is a mocker" - those who are under its influence defy common sense and reason; they see "strange things," say things that are "perverse," and experience emotions which are not true (cf. Proverbs 29:33-39). "Strong drink is brawler" - the tippler is loud, boisterous, without self-control. He experiences "woe ... sorrow ... contentions ...complaints ... [and] wounds without cause" (cf. Prov 23:29, 34). But does he learn ANYTHING? On the contrary, while he is in his stupor, bleeding from his wounds, laying in his vomit, urine and excrement he wonders, "When shall I awake?" and promises himself "I will seek

another drink."

Jesus said that we can know a tree by the fruit it bears. A good tree brings forth good fruit and a bad tree bad. What is the fruit of the breweries, the distilleries, the wine merchants and saloons, pubs and bars? It is violence in the home, violence in our neighborhoods, violence on our roads; 2,016,000 million adult offenders in prison, jail ... on parole or probation in 1996 "who had been drinking at the time of the offense for which they were convicted." Can any good thing come from imbibing alcohol? Perhaps. But the dangers of drink are so great and the warning of scripture so clear, why take the risk? Resist! Resist!

The conclusion, when all has been heard is, "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper" (Proverbs 23:31-32).

By Kieran Murphy
From Expository Files 5.5; May 1998

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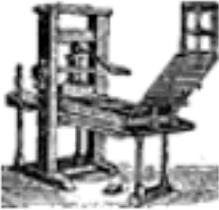
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Before You Eat, Consider The Heart of Your Host

Proverbs 23:1-3 & 6-8

A large percentage of the text in Proverbs is printed in sentence format in most editions of English Bibles. There are brief statements that stand alone and convey some aspect of life on earth (example: 19:4), sin in men (20:10) or God's wisdom for us (21:23). The nature of this kind of literature lends itself to the typical sentence format used by publishers (note the space between most verses as compared to other biblical texts).

There are, however, notable exceptions to this rule. There are some paragraphs in the book of Proverbs, where a theme or teaching goes beyond a single statement (examples: 6:1-5, 9:1-6, 16:10-15). If you will pick up a few different Bibles or translations, you will note the typical sentence format, but the exceptions to that in these paragraphs.

In Proverbs 23 there are two paragraphs which relate to the same matter. Here is Prov. 23:1-3 and under that, verses 6-8. In most Bibles, these passages are printed as paragraphs:

1 When you sit down to eat with a ruler,
Consider carefully what is before you;
2 And put a knife to your throat
If you are a man given to appetite.
3 Do not desire his delicacies,
For they are deceptive food.

6 Do not eat the bread of a miser,
Nor desire his delicacies;
7 For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.
"Eat and drink!" he says to you,
But his heart is not with you.
8 The morsel you have eaten, you will vomit up,
And waste your pleasant words.

Think about the point made in both paragraphs. Solomon is asking us to consider a danger to our character that approaches through an appearance of innocent hospitality and goodwill. A ruler who seeks some advantage over you (verses 1-3), or a miser who also seeks personal advantage (verses 6-8) offers something you like and believe you need (a good meal). The danger is, the "feeder" or host offers this meal, but not with your good in his heart. In the first paragraph, Solomon urges caution: "Consider

carefully what is before you." In the second paragraph, he alerts us to the danger through a direct prohibition: "Do not eat!"

Here is one of many cases where everything seems to be right, innocent, morally neutral and without serious consequence. What wrong could there be in eating a meal with a powerful man, or sharing hospitality with "a miser?" You have to eat? The issue Solomon wants us to consider is - the motive and character of the host, the "feeder." Apparently the "ruler" in this context has such evil designs, it would be better to "put a knife to your throat" than to let him satisfy your appetite. In the case of the "miser," the writer says, "his heart is not with you." The outcome is described in terms of vomiting up the delicacies you consumed. Often in Proverbs we are warned that circumstances and relationships that seem right us can contain hidden moral dangers. (See Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25).

There are two prominent illustrations of this in the Bible, both of these exemplify the right response. Daniel, who "resolved not to defile himself with the royal good and wine," and our Lord, who though hungry, resisted the devil's invitation to make bread of stones (Dan. 1:8, Matt. 4:3). Hunger is a legitimate need, but it may be used to our disadvantage. Food can become bait in the hands of the devil and his operatives. My practical response to this is not to refrain from all eating, but to guard myself with care and consider the approach of subtle temptation.

William Arnot wrote a useful book of essays called "Studied In Proverbs: Laws From Heaven For Life On Earth," (Kregel Publications, 1978). On these passages he said: "When the appetite is strong, and the food enticing, the danger of sinning and suffering is great, - greater than most of us care to observe, and acknowledge to ourselves. The warning here is strongly expressed, and all its strength is needed."

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 8.6; June 2001

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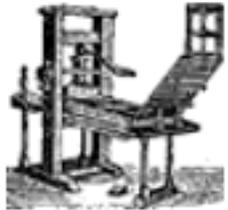
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A "Word Fitly Spoken"

Proverbs 25:11

Sometimes we know exactly what needs to be said -- we have the facts down -- but we do not give enough thought to how these things are said. In regard to some issue or controversy, or when it is necessary to speak out against some sin or error, we know exactly what should be said, but we fail in HOW we say it. We preach the truth, but without love. We say what needs to be said, but with such an overbearing arrogance or anger, our listeners cannot hear the message; it is covered up by all the "attitude."

But the bible tells us that "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." This is a beautiful image or picture -- apples of gold, surrounded by or set in silver. There is a similar statement in Prov. 16:24, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." Obviously we need to give attention to how we speak, as well as what we speak. And we need to understand what good we can do when our words are accompanied by a caring and pleasant attitude. Prov. 15:28 says that "the heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil."

We are obligated to speak the truth in love, and let our speech be always with grace, "seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one," (Eph. 4:15, Col. 4:6).

A "word fitly spoken" would be the right thing, said at the right time, in the right place, to the right person, in the right way and for the right purpose. And Jesus illustrated this perfectly.

By Warren E. Berkley
The Final Page
From Expository Files 5.4; April 1998

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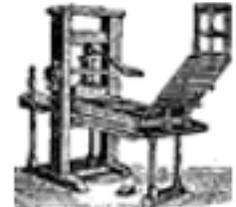


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Ever Grab a Dog's Ears?

"He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears" (Prov. 26:17).

I am a huge fan of dogs. Big ones, small ones, tall ones, fat ones. I love dogs. They are friendly, loyal, fun, loyal, hard working, loyal, furry and loyal (not necessarily in that order). I once heard an old story that when God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden part of the punishment was that a huge divide opened between them and the animal kingdom. In the last second before the chasm separated people and animals, the story went, the dog jumped across to forever stand with humans. While that story certainly is not biblical it sounds pretty good to me because it reminds me of most of the dogs I have ever known.

But as friendly and obedient as dogs can be only a complete idiot would try to pick up a dog by his ears. That is a vivid image, isn't it? Care to hold a Doberman by those short little ears? What about swinging a full-sized Lab by his big floppy ears? We instinctively know better. To grab a dog by his ears is to guarantee pain and injury - and not to the dog!

Solomon plays off this easy-to-see picture to forcefully remind us to mind our own business. Fooling with someone else's problems, butting into other's arguments, meddling in other's affairs is just not smart. In fact, it is just about as smart as grabbing a dog by his ears. When I see some folks in a big wrangle and I am tempted to step in and get everyone straightened out I just need to think about those canine ears. Then I will be reminded how my interference is not wanted or needed.

That is a pretty practical proverb, isn't it? I am amazed at the number of people who think the Bible is some outdated book that says nothing about life today. I expect those folks have never cracked Proverbs! It is just brimming with good ideas, wisdom, funny word pictures and more - all designed to help us see the best way to live. It is an enormously relevant book that does not take a Ph.D. to understand. Did you understand about the dog's ears? Then you are ready to read Proverbs. Give it a try. You will be dazzled with the simple wisdom of God's word, and your life will be better for following it. Trust God's wisdom! Try some of Proverbs today.

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Four Small, Wise Creatures

Proverbs 30:24-28

I am constantly amazed at the variety of life on earth. Animals, fish, birds, there are all kinds and varieties of each, and the variety speaks loudly of God's existence (Ps. 19:1). But of all the creatures God has created, there are four that seem particularly wise, even though they are small in size: the ant, the badger, the locust, and the spider. No, I haven't lost my senses, nor am I "stretching" for something to write about! I am simply reminded of the words of the Proverb writer who said in Proverbs 30:24-28;

"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces."

THE ANT (vs. 25)

The Proverb writer begins by stating that ants are "not strong." In comparative terms this is true. After all, I can simply step on an ant and crush him! But in relative terms ants have amazing strength. Have you ever watched an ant carrying a morsel of food? They're tireless and strong. In fact, those who study ants tell us they can carry ten to fifty times their own weight! That would be like a 150 lb. man carrying an object of 1,500 to 7,500 pounds! But more important than their relative strength, ants are constantly making preparation for the future. It seems they never rest. They are in constant motion as they go about their work. In Proverbs 6:6-8, the " sluggard " is warned to pattern himself after the ant:

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."

Ants are also armored. Scientists call the hard, outer shell of an ant "chitin." It protects them from a hostile environment and contributes to their strength. Similarly, the Christian is to be armored. We also live in a hostile world. All around us are evil men who would undo our faith. But God, in his wisdom, has provided us with a unique and glorious armor:

"...take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" Ephesians 6:13.

Like the ant, we must constantly prepare. We must tirelessly go about the work of the Lord. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" John 9:4.

THE BADGER (vs. 26)

I'm not sure what animal the Proverb writer has in mind in this verse. The New American Standard (NAS) translates the Hebrew word (shaphan) as badger, while the King James Version (KJV) translates it as "cony" (rabbit). The concordances and commentaries don't help much either! Young's translates the Hebrew "shaphan" as "a hare, hedgehog, or rabbit," while Matthew Henry calls them "Arabian mice"!

Whatever they are, these animals make their houses in the rocks. They are small and weak, yet they have the wisdom to find security in the rocks. The spiritual comparison is compelling. Like the badger (or whatever) we can only find real security in the Rock! This message of security afforded by the Lord is found everywhere throughout scripture:

Ps. 18:2: "The Lord is my Rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust...."

Ps. 40:2 "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a Rock, and established my goings."

Ps. 61:2 "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

Notice Paul's remarks concerning the wandering children of Israel; :

1Cor. 10:4 "...for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

The believer would be wise to emulate the rock badger by finding solace and care in the Rock that is Christ!

THE LOCUST (vs. 27)

A single locust is hardly noticeable. In fact, by itself, a locust is harmless and insignificant. But when locusts travel together they get the world's attention! No one knows better the damage a swarm of locusts can cause than the Pharaoh who refused to let God's people go:

"For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees...and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt." Exod. 10:15

The lesson of the locust seems to be that God 1) never intended for us to work alone, and 2) we can accomplish much by working together.

After the creation of Adam God knew it was "not good that man should be alone," (Gen 2:18) so Eve was created to provide Adam with help and assistance. This same principle of "joint effort" is described

again in Ecclesiastes 4:9. The writer tells us that "two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour." In other words, there is strength in numbers. The modern world refers to this phenomenon as "synergy" which is best expressed in the following equation:

$$1 + 1 + 1 = 4$$

With synergy, the sum of the parts is greater than the individual parts alone. The importance of working together, of emulating the locust, is clearly seen in Christ's establishment of the church which is:

"...fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Eph. 4:16.

The lesson Christians everywhere can learn from the lowly locust is this: if we "pull together" then we can change the world!

THE SPIDER (vs. 28)

The final creature mentioned in the passage again poses a translation problem. What exactly is the writer describing? The KJV renders the Hebrew word :semamith" as "spider," while the NAS renders it "lizard." Other translators even attach the word "poisonous" to the creature being described. More puzzling, however, is the meaning. Unlike the earlier creatures, the analogy of the spider is not so clear.

In his commentary of the passage, Matthew Henry says: "Spiders are very ingenious in weaving their webs with a fineness and exactness such as no art can pretend to come near. They...

spin a fine thread out of their own bowels, with a great art; and they are not only in poor men's cottages, but in kings' palaces."

Perhaps, then, the Proverb writer would have us understand this:

The beauty of the spider comes from within, and he shares this beauty whether in a poor or rich man's dwelling.

If this is the meaning, then there are many wonderful biblical examples of men and women whose inner beauty brought hope to both the rich and poor of the world. Joseph spun a web of beauty and godliness whether in prison or elevated to power in Egypt (Gen 39 - 41). Job spun a web of beauty ? a web of service ? when wealthy and when destitute. And let's not forget Paul. Whether preaching to the poorest of the masses or while imprisoned in the splendor of Caesar's palace, his inner spiritual beauty overflowed in his message of love for all who would serve God.

It is in the Good News of Christ, springing from within the true believer that "the rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all" Prov. 22:2.

By Matt Hennecke
From Expository Files 5.3; March 1998

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Spiritual Balance

Ecclesiastes 3:1

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccl. 3: 1). What this points up is the wisdom of proper balance in all things. We see balance in nature. If the rabbit population gets out of hand, the foxes will take care of it. When they kill too many rabbits, the foxes decrease. The earth is perfectly balanced, so much so that we can calculate eclipses and such like years in advance. But we also need "spiritual balance" in all things.

First, there is a need for doctrinal balance. This means giving the proper emphasis to all truths. The hobbyist is blind to all but his "pet themes," and puts undue stress on some particular doctrine that he has decided that he alone has the truth concerning. Some are carried away with "new doctrines," when they should be steadfastly contending for the "old paths." Such people fall for everything and stand for nothing.

Next, there should be balance between zeal and knowledge. That ardent fervor may be a misdirected zeal. The inquisition demonstrates the harm done when fanatics get out of spiritual balance. The Pharisees are excellent examples of it. Churches may fall prey to this unbalanced situation, having the truth, but no zeal.

Third, our preaching needs to be balanced with our practice. Sound doctrine should produce sound living or we are out of balance. Sometimes we may be as the Pharisees, and "say and do not" (Matt. 23:3). If we preach "pure religion" then we need to be practicing it. The man we commonly call the "Good Samaritan" is an excellent example of a balanced life. He put the good principles of his life into practice while the priest and Levite (who knew all about the preaching) did nothing.

Finally, there is the need for balance between emotion and logic. There is a place for both of them in the life of the Christian. These may affect entire congregations. One might rely on emotion so much that they get "carried away" with all sorts of unscriptural things, because it makes us "feel good." On the other hand a person or congregation may make a specialty of cold, heartless, ritualistic logic. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost is an example of proper balance between emotion and logic. His logic was seen in his reasoning from the scriptures. The emotion is demonstrated by his hearers being "cut to the heart." There must be balance in these areas in persuading people to obey the gospel. The heart may not be converted if the teacher is overly emotional, and scaring people into obedience is not the way.

Let us learn to get our spiritual things in balance - whatever they may be. We will then be more effective

workers for God, and you will then really know what Christianity is all about! – From <http://taylorschurch.com/>

By Bill Moseley
From Expository Files 12.6; June 2005

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The Seasons of Life and Death

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted, A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh....” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4).

As the seasons of the year, so are the seasons of life.

Death is far from the mind in springtime, when new life is seen all around, and life itself is filled with freshness and hope. New leaves adorn the trees, flowers blossom and birds sing, their fragrances and melodies sweetening the air. The "pulseless heart of the buried acorn" bursts out of the prison walls of its shell and there emerges the beginnings of a mighty oak. All of nature seems to join in the joy of life. Such is spring, a season of life and beginnings.

Then come the long, hot days of summer. The burdens of life for man and beast cannot be escaped. Wise men make use of their foresight and strength to move purposefully forward. The toils and tasks of summer tax resolve and challenge dreams. It is among the saddest of tragedies that some miss summer's opportunities and glories altogether, as grasshoppers frittering away its opportunities, or as spoiled children ignoring its glories through the blindness of ingratitude. But summer does not last forever, and in due course it too passes.

The beauty of autumn arrives, a favored time of harvests and rewards. But the days are shortening and the shadows are lengthening. The glory of the leaves' myriad colors is short-lived, and they silently fall to the earth. A chill in the wind is a harbinger of the winter that is just ahead. Migratory birds take wing in search of a warmer clime, and the great bears seek for a safe seclusion for their deep sleep called hibernation.

At last and inevitably, the frosts of winter come. The frigid blasts of winds and rain sweep across mountains and plains, hills and valleys, city streets and the countryside. The grasshoppers and tenderest

plants are the first to die, but many hearty creatures succumb and even the stately oaks' and elms' limbs are barren and appear lifeless.

We reflect on the seasons, not to see and say that we shall die, but to luxuriate in the thought that there is another springtime. I am as confident of life after death as I am of the spring that follows winter. The latter I have seen many times, but the former is even more assured by the immutable promise of the Almighty God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself from the dead. (I Peter 1:3,4; Acts 17:30-31) Thanks be to God for this unspeakable hope.

-- Via *The Bulletin of The North Courtenay Church of Christ*, Vol. I, December 28, 1997, No. 52

By Jere E. Frost
From Expository Files 14.5; May 2007

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The Curse of Riches

(Ecclesiastes 5:10-17)

The society in which we live today is one that is, without a doubt, materially-minded. About half of what is shown on television is an advertisement for one thing or another, in one way or another [whether blatantly or subtly]. Our economy is what is often called "consumer-driven" but might be more properly identified as "salesman-driven." We are constantly bombarded with advertisements that tell us we cannot be healthy without the latest diet program, that we cannot be beautiful without the latest fashionable clothing, that we cannot be happy unless we drink a certain brand of alcoholic drink, that we cannot be noticed by others unless we drive the right brand of automobile, and that we cannot really be happy with the income we now make so we are encouraged to gamble or get a higher education or learn the latest strategy so we all can make more money. Money is the bottom line!

But, as we have all probably heard, "Money doesn't buy happiness," and the studies prove it true. Kennon Sheldon, University of Missouri [Columbia] psychology professor, said, "We consistently find that people who say money is most important to them are [the unhappiest]." [Gaming Magazine, April 17, 2002] The same article listed several lottery winners who, after winning, had much less happier lives. One was sued by his best friend; another was divorced and arrested for selling drugs; one declared bankruptcy within five years and his wife divorced him; and another was broke within two years and convicted of selling drugs. Other stories abound of winners whose lives worsened because of the extra money, one even committing suicide within two years of winning over \$31 million. Truly, money was not what brought happiness, yet this country spends over \$70 billion dollars each year on legal gambling in the hopes of winning the proverbial "big one." And money again is the bottom line. Let us be reminded of the words of the apostle Paul, who said, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

Today, we will consider these facts as we seek to see the folly of the pursuit of riches. Far too many in the world make the pursuit of riches their sole or primary aim in life, yet many Christians have joined in the pursuit and are revealing themselves as even more foolish because they — of all people — should know the folly of such a pursuit. Have we not learned the words of the inspired writers who speak of the folly and foolishness of pursuing vain riches? Have we not read the many passages that speak of what might honestly be called The Curse of Riches? Today, we will do just that.

There Is Never Enough. [vv. 10, 11] The mind set on material possessions — particularly on riches — is one that is set for a fall, for those possessions are not what brings happiness and, as many find out, they always want more. There is no satisfaction in material possessions, and yet God's own people followed this path, chasing after the things that did not last, and God chastised them, asking, “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isa. 55:2) They failed to see that the pursuit of earthly gain was not what would bring true joy, and they would find no satisfaction when it was attained. Ask those lottery winners if their riches brought contentment! Surely we, as God's people today, can see beyond the false claims of those who would have us believe we'll be happy if we just have enough or make enough money. And even if we should somehow find satisfaction in money, what does that say of our heart? (cf. Rom. 8:5-9)

The mind set on obtaining and amassing financial wealth and riches is the one that is set on personal destruction. The apostle warned that many “who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition,” and went on to say, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1 Tim. 6:9, 10) Have we not learned this lessons after 2000 years?!?

Real contentment will not be found in the riches this world has to offer, but only when we can be happy with what we have, and not believing it is in what we do not have (Heb. 13:5). Real contentment will be found when the Lord blesses those whose hunger is for righteousness and not material goods (Matt. 5:6).

It Give No Real Comfort. [vv. 12, 13] Solomon himself learned this lesson the hard way, after many attempts to find happiness in material pleasures (Eccl. 2:4-10). His conclusion was that it was all “vanity and grasping for the wind” (Eccl. 2:11). There is an abiding principle that applies to this subject and many others: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). The fact that a man has more material goods is not in itself a comfort, for the more he has, the more he has to tend and to worry over and protect. He, in fact, loses sleep over his gain!

Sadly, there is no comfort to the one who has gained these material possessions for another reason: the end of the riches — and his own end. Regarding the material possessions, he knows that when he dies he has to pass it on to one who has not worked for it as he has (2:21-23). Knowing this, he finds “his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest.” And the rich man himself? If he ever had the word of God in his heart, it will soon be choked out by the cares and riches of this world and he becomes unfruitful (Luke 8:14). Surely this can be a source of discomfort!

Real comfort will not be found in the accumulation of riches, but in the fact of being a faithful servant of the Lord. The psalmist could say — each night — “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Psa. 4:8). He could rest easy because he knows where he stands with the Lord and he knows where he will be should he die, and in this knowledge he can sleep an uninterrupted sleep, comforted by the Lord's promises of protection. Those faithful ones will be further comforted in knowing what lies ahead (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

They Can Be Lost. [v. 14] Another sad fact about the riches which so many pursue and which so many seem to ignore is the reality that they can and will be lost sometimes through absolutely no fault of the owner and — many times — in spite of the owner's best efforts to prevent it. Does anyone remember their history? Do we remember the day called "Black Tuesday" when fortunes were erased within a matter of hours and people were turned to begging for food where they had lived in luxury just the day before? It can happen again! Truly, as the wise writer said, "Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Prov. 23:5). Just open your wallet at your local mall and watch!

And should he be so careful and lucky to hold onto his material possessions for a long time, it is still a futile pursuit because when this world ends, everything — including his wealth so carefully protected — will be burned up and he will have nothing once again (2 Pet. 3:10).

Real security will not come with those riches, but there ARE some riches that are secure, and it is that promised by God to the faithful — what Peter described as "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). Let us never forget that we have "a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven" (Heb. 10:34) — better than any earthly possession! The reward we have been promised is also described as "an imperishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:25), versus the corruptible rewards of this life. Paul called later his future reward "a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8). We may be enjoy the earthly riches for awhile, but why not seek the riches that do not fade away and, once received in judgment, can never be taken away?

You Can't Take It With You. [vv. 15, 16] The old adage, "You can't take it with you" is certainly true, and one that should not be ignored in the context of the wise writer's words. Though he enjoyed the earthly riches that most men can only imagine, he knew that when his life ended, those riches would go to someone else and he would take nothing with him. He also understood it would not prevent death (Psa. 49:6-9). As rich as Bill Gates is now and as rich as Andrew Carnegie was in the 1800s and as rich as an Arabian sultan may be, they all died and none will take one thin dime with them into eternity. The fact is, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27) and all the riches in the world will not prevent it! And neither will those riches sway the Judge in the end (Prov. 11:4). Some wealthy man may understand and even believe his death is inevitable, but then think those riches will somehow sway the judgment he faces. It will not. Again the wise writer warns, "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death." Material wealth will do absolutely nothing in the saving of the soul, but righteousness will go far!

Real treasure is not the riches the world sees, but we can hold one great treasure in our hands: the word of God (Psa. 19:10). The psalmist said it best when he said of the word of God, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." In the precious words of God are found things more valuable than any earthly treasure, for these are the words of life (John 6:63); these are the words by which we may be saved from our sins (Acts 11:14); these are the words given to us by God that we might know His will and the very words that will judge us in the end (John 12:47, 48)! We need these words!

But let us not forget the treasures we seek are not on this earth, but the ones we lay up in heaven (Matt.

6:20). Real treasures are not those we can hold and see and feel and spend here on earth, but the treasures that we may have when we begin by taking up our cross and following Jesus (cf. Mark 10:21). Those treasures do not fade away, cannot be lost, and are more valuable than any earthly possessions we may accumulate. Do you have those treasures?

Where is your treasure? Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Where is your treasure? Where is your heart? I plead with you to set your heart on the heavenly things and make heaven your goal — not earthly things and earthly treasures and earthly riches. You may, in the eyes of the world, "go far" but in the eyes of the righteous Judge, you will go nowhere unless you have riches laid up in heaven. Let us not be as the foolish man who laid up for himself treasures and had none reserved in heaven (cf. Luke 12:16-21). Why not begin now laying up those treasures?

By Steven Harper
From Expository Files 12.7; July 2005

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The House of Mourning

Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

Eccl. 7:2-4 "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."

This is a complete reversal from the usual response. It's better to mourn than to feast? Who would say that? Inspiration did. Why is it better to go to the house of mourning? Solomon gave three answers:

Learn That's Where We're All Going. When we pay a condolence call or visit the grave we are reminded of our own mortality. The funeral is where we are all going to end up. Isaiah told Hezekiah "Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live," (2 Kings 20:1) and sinful Israel was told to "Prepare to meet your God." (Amos 4:12) The fool refuses to deal with eternity. He thinks of the pleasures of this life alone. But the wise man learns the lessons of life and death so the he may prepare in one for the other.

It Makes the Heart Better. To consider life in all its stages, ultimately and invariably culminating in death, gives us a healthy, balanced view of life. Just as a visit to the home of the poor helps us appreciate our wealth and a trip to the bed of the sick makes us appreciate our health, some time spent with the dead or grieving helps us appreciate life. This is not the easiest lesson to learn, but it is a necessary one. When we give sober thought to serious matters it brings good benefits later. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." (Heb. 12:11)

Only Fools Try To Have Pleasure All of the Time. More fun and merriment is not what we need. More soberness is. The fool is interested only in what is currently fair, pleasant, easy, diverting, amusing and fun. He gives no thought to serious things and so never acts seriously. But the wise considers all of life rationally, soberly and seriously. So he pays his respects to the dead and considers their life, his own life and his own death. Thus the condolence call is a necessary and expected duty. It is not some outdated social custom, nor is it to be left only to our parents and other older people. It is not what elders are there for and it is not what preachers are paid for. It is the duty of all who are friends and brethren with those who are infirmed, ill and dying if for no other reason than to know that this is a part of life as well. It is not to be avoided simply because we are squeamish and find it icky. To avoid this duty (and

miss out on an opportunity for a sober lesson) is a conscious, willful act of foolishness; and the practitioner of it will always remain the fool for it. The house of feasting may take our minds away from the very thing that we need to think about. We can learn something at the funeral. We are likely just to be diverted at the feast and never see our real need.

Consider one final reason why we are to do this: [We Are To Follow The Example of Jesus](#). We all know the "shortest verse in the Bible." It is Jn. 11:35, "Jesus wept." This little verse teaches us so much about Jesus. Think again to the setting in which "He wept." Jesus came to Bethany to heal Lazarus and met the grieving sisters, Mary and Martha. As He sees their tears, and those of all the mourners present, "He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled." (Jn. 11:33) Our Savior consoled the family with words of hope and went to the cemetery with them. He then performed a miracle that comforted them. We must satisfy ourselves with consoling the family with more mundane acts of kindness. But we must go nevertheless.

Jesus went not only to the wedding in Cana of Galilee, He also went to the graveyard in Bethany. Do you?

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 7.11; November 2000

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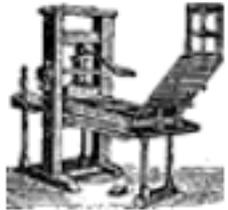
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Sobriety is Better than Levity

Ecclesiastes 7:2-6

"Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise Than for a man to hear the song of fools. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity."

In this passage, Solomon is telling us that one thing is better, more valuable than another. It would not seem so among men in the world today -- but it is better to go to a funeral than a party.

Solomon is not saying -- you should never go to the house of feasting; this is not a wholesale condemnation of all parties (though those involving sin should be shunned). But there is more personal value for us -- to attend a funeral!

The reason might be explained this way. I'll express this through a question: Typically, when we attend a party, do we go home and think about our spiritual lives, God and eternity? No -- typically, when we go to a party and have a good time; we come home tired, laughing and our stomachs are bloated.

However -- when we attend a funeral, that event tends to generate sobriety, not levity. A funeral brings us face to face with the reality of death and it is good to think about death! And a funeral is one of the few occasions where there is this sober focus on death. Can you imagine - having a few friends over to eat sandwiches and talk about death?

That's not what we do. It takes a funeral for us to take the time to con-temple where we are all headed, and hopefully - think about whether we are ready to die. Solomon says here, "death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." A funeral may leave us with a sad face - but the thoughts we must entertain about death **MAY DO OUR HEARTS GOOD.**

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure." Now -- along this same line - Solomon wants us to know - there is something else that may be unpleasant, but can do us good: It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools!

At a funeral -- ideally -- you hear the rebuke of a wise man (take note, preachers!). At the party -- you hear the song of fools. Obviously -- the funeral is better for us than the party.

"Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless." I'm sure most of you will know what I mean, when I use the word "kindling." When you start a fire -- you gather up some dry twigs, and use them to get the fire going. What happens is, the kindling makes a loud popping noise or crackling sound... but it doesn't last very long. That's the way Solomon describes the laughter that is typical of parties -- LOUD AND ENTERTAINING, but TEMPORARY. Of course, there is more permanence and value in the funeral -- and the thoughts generated by the reality of death can do more for us than the laughter of fools. Let us take this to heart, and do what Solomon recommends at the end of this marvelous book: FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

By Warren E. Berkley

The Front Page

From Expository Files 5.11; November 1998

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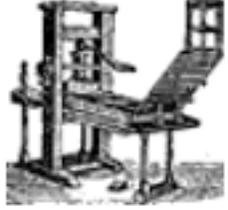
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Solomon's Editorial On Immature Leaders

Ecclesiastes 10:16-20

16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, And your princes feast in the morning!
17 Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, And your princes feast at the proper time; For strength and not for drunkenness!
18 Because of laziness the building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks.
19 A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything.
20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

In this section of Ecclesiastes, Solomon returns to the subject of men who govern -- practical politics -- and he addresses something he saw that is bad; perhaps we have seen this too.

It is especially tough to live in a nation which is governed by an immature leader. I don't think this necessarily means a young man - I believe this is about a man who has never grown up! He may be fifty or older -- but in some ways, he still acts like a teenager, or a little boy. This is a bad thing; it is especially hard to live in a place which is governed by an immature leader ...

And one problem is - his immaturity, his worldly, carnal approach to life is reflected - not only by his behavior, but also by those in his administration. His immature habits and practices filter down into the whole realm and affect the people under him. So, they eat at all hours of the day and spend less time ruling, and more time playing!

On the other hand, the wise king; the mature leader surrounds himself with responsible men, who feast at the appointed times, and not just to get drunk! You see, Solomon saw this and wrote to us about it: A LAND WITHOUT A WISE AND MATURE LEADER IS IN TROUBLE. The nation with a child as its ruler and whose princes are given only to satisfying their own desires is destined for destruction -- Rulers should eat and drink to obtain strength, not to indulge in revelry and drunkenness. Where there is a party-animal life style in high places - and rulers act like teenagers indulging their fleshly desires... THAT'S BAD FOR THE WHOLE NATION.

It is like a building which is destroyed through slothfulness. It is bad when rulers are involved in sex, parties and indulgence -- and think that money can buy a cover-up. "Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning." Pray for our nation.

(Based on thoughts found in STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES by David Posey
Folsom, California Revised, September, 1996.

By Warren E. Berkley
The Final Page
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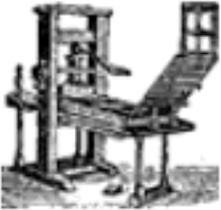
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Maintenance

Ecclesiastes 10:18

The words of the preacher/writer show a sub-theme in Ecclesiastes ten: his observations about a land (nation) and the king (leader). This is developed in Eccl. 10:16-20. Part of that is this statement: “Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.” As applied by leaders and in nations, it is not wise to wait for problems to occur, then quickly put together some remedy. There needs to be a pro-active emphasis on prevention. One good step in that direction is the simple work of maintenance.

Among other things, I’ve always preached maintenance to my children. They were taught to clean their rooms, organize their belongings and keep their toys in working condition (for at least a week). Later, I trained them in the “old school” of car owners: change the oil every 3,000 miles or three months; follow the manufacturer’s maintenance schedule; rotate tires; have brakes checked regularly. The typical response was, “I can’t afford to do all of this maintenance.” My answer was, “you cannot afford not to maintain the vehicle.”

An absence of maintenance can kill a local church. While building maintenance ought to have a place, that’s not the kind of maintenance I’m writing about here. Maintenance in the local church must take the form of good oversight (1 Pet. 5:2), reverent order in worship (1 Cor. 14:40), discipline (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:14) and sound teaching (Titus 1:9, 2:1). When any of this work is slighted by idleness or corruption, “the building decays.”

Maintenance is crucial to the quality of marriage. Marriages do not automatically grow stronger over time. Both must be committed to the Lord and each other, then grow together in that commitment. Both must humbly admit their mistakes and seek forgiveness. Both must learn the patience of Christ and show the love He displayed. Both must refuse the destructive worldly influences, the temptations of the workplace, and the consuming career orientation that can gradually erode the relationship. A periodic marriage check-up may put you behind! Get up daily, honor your mate, work on the relationship and seek God’s help. “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge,” (Heb. 13:4). Fail in this and “the building decays.”

Let each of us stand fast in the purpose of personal maintenance. Many become alienated from God gradually through years of simple neglect. Bible reading is left undone; prayer is only said in crisis; attendance becomes a Sunday morning ritual; we lose sight of the value of the gospel, and we let the world dominate who we are. Through lack of personal maintenance, we trample the Son of God

underfoot, count the blood of the covenant unworthy and insult the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). If you fear this could happen to you, get busy now before “the building decays.” “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come,” (1 Tim. 4:8).

“Attention to the counsels and admonitions of God’s Word cannot fail to be serviceable in delivering us from temptations to slothfulness.” (D. Thomas, Pulpit Commentary, Prov. 10:18, Homilies).

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 12.6; June 2005

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An Inspired Song About God's Love for His People

Song of Solomon

A wedding day is meant to be a wonderful time of great joy. The Bible portrays the gathering of the Lord's people unto the Lord on that final day as eternity begins as a bride joining her betrothed on their wedding day (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:1-4; 9-10). The groom is the Lord Jesus; the bride is His people. His best man was John the Baptist (John 3:28-29). The New Testament in several places makes an analogy between the love of a couple - man and woman, husband and wife; groom and bride - with the love of Jesus for His Church (Ephesians 5:25-33). More generally, the love of God for all His people is also pictured this way in the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:19-20).

God's Love Has Always Been Something to Sing About

Both the teachings of the Old Testament and the New Testament include parables, allegories and figures of speech to describe God's relationship with His people. One example of this is one of the 1005 songs that Solomon wrote (1 Kings 4:32). The Lord has preserved one of these songs for us, evidently because of its special importance. In fact, it begins with the phrase, "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's". What is this "song of songs" about, and what does it have to do with God's love for His people?

Both Jews and Early Christians saw the Song of Solomon as allegorical. Ancient Jewish commentaries speak of the "Song" as an allegory of the love between God and His people. Jeremiah, Isaiah and Hosea all appeal to the people to be faithful to God on the basis that a spiritual marriage contract existed between God and Israel.

Early Christians also looked at the book the same way, emphasizing the relationship between Christ and His people, the church. This interpretation was in line with what Paul and John wrote and Jesus Himself taught.

The Story Summary

1. A humble family of shepherds including a daughter who is the focus of the Song.

2. The young maiden and a young shepherd fall in love. They become devoted to one another and seem to vow themselves to one another. However, the brothers do not look favorably on the developing relationship.
3. One day the king of the land (Solomon?) and his retinue pass by and see the maiden. He is taken with her beauty and he decides she ought to become one of his wives. She is taken to Jerusalem and put in care of the women amidst the luxury, comforts and grandeur of the palace.
4. She is enticed with gifts of jewelry and advancement in the court if she will become another of the king's wives. But she is loyal to her shepherd whom she loves. Her thoughts constantly dwell on her "beloved" and her heart belongs only to him.
5. The king comes to realize that her heart belongs to another and will not be swayed. He is impressed with her virtue and dignity and grants her permission to return to her home.
6. She joyfully sends word to her "beloved" to come and escort her home, and he eagerly responds. There is dialogue between the two as they return home as they express their joy and love for one another, and look forward to their marriage.

Some Parallels Between the Song of Songs and the Love Between Jesus & His Church

The story is somewhat difficult to follow due to the unannounced changing of speakers and locales (hearing it read or sung by different speakers as originally done would have been helpful). Note some wonderful points of comparison between the Song of Songs and Jesus and His Church. The Shepherd/Groom is a figure of Jesus; The Shulammitte Maiden is a figure of the church. The relationship is tender and loyal between the two, and survives the obstacles to it from several sources, including the maiden's brothers as well as the king.

The Maiden In The King's Palace

Available to the maiden while at the palace are all sorts of comforts and luxuries far beyond her wildest imaginations, but she cannot be distracted by them from her first love, the shepherd. She is surrounded by luxury and costly perfumes, but she desires the fragrance of her Shepherd's name (SOS 1:3; Matthew 6:33; 19-21; 24; John 6:27). She asks to be "drawn" after the Shepherd that they may be together (SOS 1:4; John 12:32; Hebrews 4:16; James 4:8). Even the other maidens of the court recognize her deep devotion to her shepherd. They consider her love for the shepherd as evidence of his fine qualities, but will prove to be resentful of the maiden (SOS 1:4b; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12). She had been tested by suffering hardships and yet possesses beauty and is unashamed. Her toil "on the farm" had built endurance and character. (SOS 1:5-7; 1 Peter 1:6,7; James 1:2-4; Matthew).

But the king is very persistent and tries to win over the maiden and cause her to forget the shepherd. Still, her love endures. The ladies of the court ask where her shepherd is? Has she been abandoned? Has he forgotten her? How often does the world suggest that God has forsaken us? (SOS 6:1; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10; 2 Timothy 4:16-18).

The maiden's answer is that her shepherd is far away, but he has not forsaken nor forgotten her. That is her confidence and a source of her strength. He is preparing a home for them both (SOS 6:2,3; Hebrews 13:5,6; John 14:1-3).

After some final attempts to seduce the maiden, the king permits a message be sent to the Shepherd to come and take her home. She recalls the open country and longs to return there and make a home with her special one (SOS 7:11; Hebrews 11:10;16; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

The Journey Home

The shepherd comes to the palace and the two return to the countryside together. As they near home, villagers see them coming (SOS 8:5a). Perhaps this is a figure of the angels of heaven so intently interested in our Shepherd and His Bride, the church. The Shepherd reminds her of a previous time in the yard of the cottage where she had been born and raised (SOS 8:5b). The maiden affirms her loyalty and love for the shepherd, and asks for the same in return. Nothing had been able to quench her love for him. Nor can anything quench his love for her. She asks for a seal, or pledge of His love. We, as the church, have it (SOS 8:6-7; John 15:13; Ephesians 1:13,14).

Perhaps the stage we are at right now is in the king's palace, being enticed by the world to leave our first love (like Ephesus did - Revelation 2:4-5). There have been and will be obstacles and distractions. Will our love for the Lord be proven true? Especially in times of distress, the early church had a saying. It is similar to the way the Song of Songs closes (The bride says: "Hurry, my beloved" (SOS 8:14a;) "Amen! Come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.9; September 2006

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The Mountain of the Lord's House

Isaiah 2:1-5

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow into it. 3 Many people shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law. And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 5 O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD." (See also Micah 4:1-5).

There are two ideas usually advanced regarding the reason these two passages are almost identical. One is that both prophets quote from an earlier source. The other is that one of the prophets took it from the other. However, some would have Isaiah taking it from Micah, others would have Micah taking it from Isaiah and still others are not certain who took it from whom, but one took it from the other. I prefer Peter's explanation of the giving of prophecy: "...prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 1:21). Thus Isaiah and Micah prophesied that which the Holy Spirit moved each of them to prophecy. Why should that be thought strange when we consider Matthew, Mark, Luke and John repeatedly wrote about the same things?

Isaiah is straight forward regarding the thrust of the vision. What he saw was concerning Judah and Jerusalem. What he saw was not for the present nor near future, but rather "it shall come to pass in the latter days." This is the only occurrence of the expression "latter days" in the prophecy of Isaiah. However, it is not the only place it occurs in the Old Testament. After defining the Hebrew word involved as meaning: "in the end of the days," THE NEW BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS-GESENIUS HEBREW-ENGLISH LEXICON makes this comment: "a prophetic phrase denoting the final period of the history so far as the speaker's perspective reaches; the sense thus varies with the context, but it often is the ideal or Messianic future." It seem to be generally agreed that Isaiah used it in reference to the Messianic age.

Many interpret "the mountain of the LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains" as a reference to the prominence upon which the temple was built in Jerusalem. However, in prophecy symbols generally have the same meaning although they may be applied to a variety of things. In the prophecy concerning Babylon in Jeremiah 51:25 the prophet wrote, "'Behold I am against you O destroying mountain, who destroys the earth,' says the LORD." 'And I will stretch out My hand against you, Roll you down from the rocks, And make you a burnt mountain'." A mountain as a prophetic symbol indicates either a kingdom or a government which amounts to the same thing due to the fact that a kingdom is a form of government.

Thus it seems proper to understand the meaning of Isaiah 2:2 is that the government of the house of the LORD shall have preeminence over all levels of human governments. This harmonizes with Daniel 2:44 which tells us about a kingdom which God will set up that never shall be destroyed and will break in pieces and consume the world kingdoms of the prophecy and shall stand forever. It also harmonizes with the depiction of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

The mountain considered is "[the mountain of the LORD'S house.](#)" Although it would be natural for one to imagine that Isaiah would think of the physical temple in Jerusalem, it should be kept in mind that the prophets did not always understand the things they prophesied (1 Peter 1:10 & 11). The New Testament gives another identity to "the LORD'S house." In 1 Timothy 3:15 the apostle Paul wrote, "I write so you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God,...." Now consider the fact that the church is equated with the kingdom. In Luke 22:29 & 30 Jesus told His apostles, "...I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom,...." Paul wrote the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2) then in chapter 10 verses 14 - 21 warned them against idolatry and fellowship with demons, stating in verse 21 "you cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons." Thus showing that the Lord's table is in the church and therefore the Lord's Kingdom. Of course this simply shows that those in the church are the citizens governed by the King of the Kingdom. In Isaiah 2:2 "The mountain of the LORD'S house" refers to the government of the church which now is the LORD'S house - the house of God.

["And all nations shall flow to it."](#) After His resurrection Jesus, having received all authority, commissioned His apostles to go make disciples of all the nations (Mt. 28:19). In Acts 1:8 Jesus told them, "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Chapter 2 of Acts records the Holy Spirit coming upon them and from that point through the book of Jude we have a record of the fulfilling of the Commission which Jesus gave. The invitation of Jesus is: "Come to Me, all..." (Mt. 11:28 - 30). When the apostle Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he said, "...in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:35). And in Colossians 1:23 the apostle Paul wrote that the gospel "was preached to every creature under heaven...."

The fulfilling of the ["many people"](#) section of Isaiah 2:3 can be seen in the New Testament record of the

establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and then its growth and development as the disciples of Jesus, being scattered from Jerusalem by persecution, went everywhere preaching the gospel - the word of truth (Eph. 1:13). "Philip went down to the city of Samaria" (Acts 8:5). Philip baptized the Ethiopian nobleman "and he went on his way" home (Acts 8:39). Thus the gospel became known in Ethiopia. Then we learn of a disciple at Damascus (Acts 9:10). In Acts 9:31 we read about "churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria." We then read about saints "in Lydda" (Acts 9:32). Next we are told of those in Sharon turning "to the Lord" (Acts 9:35). In Acts 9:36 - 38 we learn of disciples at Joppa. In Acts 10 and 11 we learn about the gospel being taken to the Gentile Cornelius. In Acts 11:19 we are told about those scattered by the persecution going to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch "preaching the word." "...The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). In Acts 13:5 we read about Barnabas and Saul preaching at Salamis, Cyprus. The record continues to reveal the spread of the gospel as far as Rome and even Paul contemplating of going into Spain. Paul's contemplation of Spain does not necessarily mean that the gospel had not gone there. There were saints at Rome before Paul went there (Ro. 1:7 & 13). Indeed many from the various nations were flowing into the church.

The last part of verse 3 is a parallelism: "[For out of Zion shall go forth the law. And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.](#)" The elements of this parallelism are reversed. The beginning of the first line corresponds with the end of the second line "Zion" and "Jerusalem" mean the same. And the end of the first line corresponds with the beginning of the second line "the law" and "word of the LORD" mean the same. The law by which those who lived before Moses did not go forth from Zion nor from Jerusalem. Neither did the law of the LORD given through Moses go forth from Zion or from Jerusalem, but from Sinai. Therefore Isaiah prophesied regarding a new law. The prophet Jeremiah also prophesied regarding a new law in chapter 31 verses 31 - 34. There the prophecy is of a new covenant. However, in that prophecy is the statement, "I will put my law in their minds, and write it in their hearts." That this prophecy has been fulfilled may be observed in Hebrews chapters 8 and 10. In the allegory regarding a desire to be under the law which is found in Galatians 4:21 - 31 plainly shows that the bondwoman woman and freewoman are symbolic of two covenants. The covenant from Mount Sinai symbolized by the bondwoman, but Jerusalem above which is the mother of us all is symbolized by the freewoman because we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

In Hebrews 12:18 - 24 we are informed that we have not come to Mount Sinai (vv. 18 - 21), but unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. Observe the things mentioned both in Isaiah 2 and here. The fulfilling of the prophecy "out of Zion shall go forth the law. And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" actually began at literal physical Jerusalem. However, the things which we have considered indicate that the prophecy was not referring to physical Jerusalem, but rather "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."

Previously we noticed the spreading of the word of the Lord when those scattered by the persecution went everywhere preaching it. Now notice in Romans 10:17 that faith is by hearing the word of God.

Then consider 1 Thessalonians 1:8 where Paul wrote, "...from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia, but in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out,...." The law which is the word of the LORD did not originate with the firstborn ones - the church, but the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Individually and collectively the firstborn ones have a responsibility to support the truth taught by Jesus Christ and those whom He authorized to speak for Him. In John 13:20 Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." And the apostle Peter wrote, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God." In fulfilling the responsibility to support the truth each one needs to remember that a curse has been pronounced on anyone who preaches a perversion of the gospel (Gal. 1:6 - 9) which is the word of truth (Eph. 1:13).

Isaiah 2:4 "**He shall judge between the nations and rebuke many people.**" It does not appear to be an coincidence that this immediately follows "out of Zion shall go forth the law. And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." It is indeed the word of God that will judge us "in the last day" (Jn. 12:48 - 50) and "we will be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas 2:12). Although these verse are often applied to the final judgment, it should be remembered that when Jesus spoke of "the last day," He, like Isaiah, was speaking before the time of "the last day." We are judged by the word of the LORD and the law of liberty according to whether or not we do what His word, His law requires. In Matthew 7:24 - 27 those who hear and do what Jesus has said will be judged to be wise and those who do not do what He has said will be judged foolish. After the Day of Pentecost, all who obey Him are judged recipients of "eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:8 & 9). "...In every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:35). That righteousness is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16 & 17). In that the Lord who day by day adds to the number those who are being saved (Acts 2:47), it is necessary to draw the conclusion that since Pentecost mankind has been in the last days and the judging of the nations has been and is taking place.

Certainly the New Testament rebukes many people. It rebukes every sinner and all have sinned (Romans 3:23). When a sinner in any nation takes to heart the rebuke of the word of God, repents and determines to "walk in His paths" and is brought near by the blood of Christ; Christ Himself is our peace who has made both one and broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity ... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace (Eph. 2:13 - 15). This is symbolized by beating swords into plow shears and spears into pruning hooks.

By this time it should be obvious that the prophecy of Isaiah 2:1 - 5 is not about physical things, but rather about the future spiritual government, kingdom or church which is the house of God. It is not a prophecy foretelling the future of carnal nations. Those from every nation who flow into the house of God, come under the dominion of King Jesus and submit to His governing of them "shall not lift up sword against" those from formerly enemy nations who have found peace in Christ Himself through His blood. The enmity between them has been abolished. "**They shall not learn war anymore.**" They are instructed: "if it be possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Ro. 12:18); "pursue the things which make for peace" (Ro. 14:19); endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the

bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3); "Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:13); "pursue peace with all..." (Heb. 12:14) and "seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:11). We need not look to the future for what is referred to as "the peaceable kingdom. It is here and has been here in fulfillment of Isaiah 2:1 - 5 since the Day of Pentecost.

In the conclusion of Isaiah's prophecy the house of Israel is urged to "[walk in the light of the LORD.](#)" On the Day of Pentecost the apostle Peter made the appeal: "...let all the house of Israel know assuredly (or believe confidently) that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). This is a plea for them to accept Christ as their king; submit to His dominion; be governed by His word - His law; dwell in His house; be at peace and "walk in the light of the LORD." It was "this Jesus" who in John 12:46 had said, "I am come a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." "This Jesus" also is the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Consider also Matthew 7:13 & 14 and choose Jesus - the light, the way of truth which leads to life. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

By Fred Shewmaker
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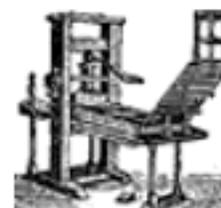


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The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth

Isaiah 2:1-5

"The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it will come about that In the last days, The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." (Isaiah 2:1-5).

It was about 700 B.C. when Isaiah prophesied that the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem. But he also prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed. He then predicted that it would be rebuilt by Cyrus, yet unborn, and then centuries later from a rebuilt Jerusalem the word of the Lord would go forth unto the earth. All these things came to pass as history unfolded precisely as Isaiah said it would, event after event, through the coming years. But Isaiah was not the only prophet to speak of the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem.

Three Prophets Speak

There are at least three different prophecies about the event that would take place many centuries later when the apostles stood in Jerusalem and began to preach the gospel of the Risen Savior for the very first time.

First, there is Isaiah, as we have already seen. "And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths. 'For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'" (Isaiah 2:3). This is a wonderful description of what would occur on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Second, there is the prophet Joel. "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord

Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the Lord has said, Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls. " (Joel 2:32).

Third, there is the prophet Micah who also spoke about the deliverance of the Lord. He said, "And many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Micah 4:2).

The Fulfillment

These three prophecies, as well as others, were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' ascension into heaven. His chosen apostles rose and preached the word of the new kingdom, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Isaiah had said that the Lord would "teach us concerning His ways" and how we might "walk in His paths" promising that the "law will go forth" and "the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Here we have four different descriptions of what the gospel of Christ would be. The gospel is God's "ways"; God's "paths", God's "law" and God's "word."

When the apostles preached the gospel on Pentecost, this is what they were preaching. When they took the gospel from Jerusalem into all the world, they were taking God's "ways" and "paths". When we preach the same gospel today, we are preaching the Lord's "law" and "word."

The gospel of Christ consists of telling of "the mighty deeds of God" (Acts 2:11). The people on that day were told to "call upon the name of the Lord" just as the prophecy had stated (Acts 2:21). When they were brought to faith by the message taught, they asked what this all entailed. They wanted to know exactly what to do (Acts 2:37). They were told the Lord's "law", or "word", on the subject, just as the prophets had said. They were told, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). Listen! This is not some idea of man. it is the "way", the "path", the "law" and the "word" of the Lord.

The Church is the Product of Saving Souls

This brings us to another point. Some wonder if it is necessary to be a member of the church to be saved, it is difficult to answer such a question because it is based on a flawed premise; a misunderstanding of the relationship between the church and salvation.

First, the church does not save anyone. The church is the product of salvation. When a person is saved, he or she is added to the number that makes up the Lord's church by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). When people are saved, they are saved from their past sins; "set apart" from them. You see, being a member of the church is not a requirement for being saved, but being saved is a requirement for being added to the church, and by definition, when one is saved, the Lord adds him or her to the church. This means that there are no saved people outside the Lord's church, because the Lord adds those who are being saved to His church.

Second, we need to understand that there is just one church to which the Lord adds the saved. The

church is also referred to in the New Testament as the Lord's body, flock, family and kingdom. As the Lord adds to His church, He is building it (Matthew 16:18; 1 Peter 2:5,9). So, when the Bible uses the term "church" in this sense, it is not talking about a physical structure, or a human organizational structure, or even a local congregation, or church. God does not add us to these things when we are saved. But rather, to His spiritual body.

One final point: all three of the prophecies we noted referred to the church as a "mountain." Isaiah (2:3) called it "mountain of the Lord" and "Zion" and Joel (2:3 2) called it "Mount Zion" and Micah called it "the mountain of the Lord" The New Testament has plenty to say about this as well (Ephesians 1:22,23; 2:16-20; Hebrews 12:22,23). As Isaiah's prophecy says, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord!"

By Jon W. Quinn
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Christ and His Kingdom In Isaiah 9

Isaiah 9

One of the best ways to introduce the book of Isaiah is to use the first verse. In that first sentence some of the basic matters about the book are given. "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."

The word "vision" here - as used in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament - is equal to DIVINE REVELATION; so this book called Isaiah contains that which the Lord revealed to this prophet, who was the son of Amoz.

These things concerned "JUDAH AND JERUSALEM." At this time, there was the northern kingdom, called Israel. And some of the things that pertain to the northern kingdom do come up in the prophecies of Isaiah. However, Isaiah's message was directed primarily to God's people in Judah and Jerusalem.

As to the time when Isaiah lived and prophesied, this verse says, "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." The basic facts about this O.T. book are given right here in the first verse.

Another verse we can use to introduce this book is Isaiah 6:8, where the call of Isaiah is reported. It says there, that Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "WHOM SHALL I SEND, AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?" Then this man, Isaiah, replied: "HERE AM I! SEND ME." This indicates two things: One, that this man was called of God to prophesy these things. Two, that he was ready and willing to serve in this capacity. You might be interested to know - the book of Isaiah is quoted 83 times in the N.T., 12 of those quotations in the book of Matthew. With these things in mind we turn our attention to chapter nine.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Isaiah, chapters seven through twelve - the prophet is dealing with what could be called THE ASSYRIAN CRISIS.

You remember - from verse 1 - that one of the kings in Isaiah's time was Ahaz. Well, in the days of Ahaz, the king and his people were "worried to death" because, just north of their border, the Northern kingdom and Syria were joining forces and it seemed like they were planning to conquer Judah.

Now God - through Isaiah - had something to say about all this. God sent word to king Ahaz, telling him

NOT TO WORRY ABOUT THIS NORTHERN CONFEDERATION. The exact words are (7:4): "Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted..." God said, about this confederation or plan, "IT SHALL NOT STAND!" (Isa. 7:7). So what Ahaz should have done **WAS TO BELIEVE GOD.** But, he didn't pay much attention to God. **KING AHAZ WENT ON TO FORMULATE AND EXECUTE HIS OWN PLAN OF DEFENSE;** a plan that eventually backfired. King Ahaz hired the nation of **ASSYRIA,** to come over and crush this northern confederation. He even agreed to pay them for their help; he paid them well - in silver and gold from the house of the Lord.

When Ahaz didn't pay attention to God, and when he devised his own plan, he was guilty of unbelief; and for that unbelief he was to be punished. What happened was, after the Assyrians had crushed the northern confederation (as Ahaz had paid them to do) ... **THEY JUST KEPT COMING SOUTH, RIGHT INTO JUDAH AND JERUSALEM,** where Ahaz was. So, because of his unbelief, the king got more than he bargained for.

Isaiah chapters seven and eight tell us about these things: **THE ASSYRIAN CRISIS.** Chapter eight tells how God used Assyria to punish both kingdoms, Israel and Judah. At the end of chapter eight, there is a picture of the gloom and darkness there would be, as the Assyrians came through with their devastating military force. The last verse of chapter eight shows the people looking around - and seeing trouble, darkness, and the gloom of anguish.

As chapter nine opens, the prophet is saying: **THIS GLOOM WILL NOT LAST FOREVER! THE PICTURE OF TOTAL GLOOM WHICH CLOSED THE PRECEDING CHAPTER GIVES WAY TO A PICTURE OF BRILLIANT LIGHT.** Things would be bad, in the aftermath of this Assyrian crisis -- **BUT, THEY WOULDN'T BE BAD FOREVER!!**

There was still reason for hope, as to the future. God's plan would be carried out! A time would come, Isaiah says, **WHEN DARKNESS WOULD BE DISPELLED BY LIGHT; GLOOM WOULD BE REPLACED BY DARKNESS, AND GOD WOULD HAVE A NATION OF PEOPLE, RULED BY A PERFECT KING.**

These things, I'm persuaded, refer to Christ and the church.

ISAIAH 9:1-7

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order

it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isa. 9:1-7, NKJV).

There isn't any doubt in my mind, this passage is Messianic. I believe Isaiah is giving a prophecy of Christ and the church. I say that with such boldness for these reasons:

MATTHEW, in Matt. 4:12-17, **QUOTES THIS PASSAGE - AND HE APPLIES IT TO CHRIST!** In the absence of any New Testament reference, it is sometimes difficult to locate the specific fulfillment of an O.T. prophecy. But in this case we have an inspired commentary, or inspired interpretation: **MATTHEW, WRITING BY INSPIRATION, TELLS US** that these things in Isaiah nine pertain to Christ!

Matt. 4:12-15ff...Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: (Matt. 4:12-15, NKJV).

Secondly, in Isaiah 9:2, it says that "the people who walked in darkness **HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT**; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined." Isaiah is using what is called, "the perfect of prophetic certainty" -- that is, **HE IS DESCRIBING EVENTS TO COME AS IF THEY WERE ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED**; he was so certain these things would happen, he spoke of them **AS IF THEY HAD ALREADY HAPPENED**: "upon them a light has shined." But what I want us to see is: **THIS GREAT LIGHT!** This great light can be none other than Jesus Christ. {See Lk. 2:32; Jno. 1:4; Jno. 12:46; Col. 1:13}.

In addition, **THIS GREAT "NATION" THE PROPHET FORESAW WOULD NOT DEPEND UPON CARNAL WEAPONS!** Look at verse 5: "For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning and fuel of fire." You see, Isaiah was looking to a time when the equipment and weapons of carnal warfare would be thrown away, rolled up and burned. This is like what Isaiah had said about the kingdom of Christ earlier - back in 2:4, where he talked about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. This looks to the spiritual kingdom, that is not of this world - Jesus said, in Jno. 18:36. And, on two occasions, Paul made the point - that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor.10:4, and Eph. 6:12).

So we have the evidence of Matt. 4, the mention of the "great light," and this statement about no carnal weapons. All of this pointing to the object of this passage in Isa. 9 -- Christ and His church.

I submit a fourth point of evidence: **I BELIEVE VERSE 6 IS ONE OF THE PLAINEST REFERENCES TO CHRIST YOU'LL FIND ANYWHERE IN THE PROPHETS.**

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and

His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Here we have a clear picture of the birth of the Messiah; the character of His person, the nature of His reign and His eternal deity. Some orthodox Jewish commentators and modernists will say THIS WAS HEZEKIAH, who reigned after Ahaz. Well, Hezekiah was a better man than Ahaz; Hezekiah carried out some good plans and policies BUT HE WASN'T GOD; he wasn't "everlasting Father!" Verse 6 is one of the clearest references anywhere in the Bible, POINTING TO THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST. And, one more point: I BELIEVE WE SEE IN VERSE 7, Jesus reigning over His kingdom! Hezekiah's reign came to an end - in fact, not a very pleasant end. During His reign, Isaiah prophesied of the Jews being carried into captivity in Babylon - and in the reign of Zedekiah, THAT HAPPENED. Even though - after 70 years - God let them go back to Jerusalem, the Jewish city re-fell in 70 A.D. BUT HERE IN ISA. 9:7, reference is made to a kingdom that would never end! Another point that lends support to the belief that this passage is a prophecy, ABOUT CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.

A LITTLE BIBLE GEOGRAPHY LESSON

In the first two verses of Isaiah 9 - the prophet talks about how oppressed the land of Zebulun and Naphtali were in the aftermath of the Assyrian crisis - BUT A TIME WOULD COME WHEN A GREAT LIGHT WOULD SHINE "IN GALILEE OF THE GENTILES."

The land allocation for Zebulun and Naphtali is the area called Galilee. In other words the land given to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali after the conquest of Canaan, WAS LATER CALLED GALILEE. Now - here's the point we want to look at, in Isaiah chapter 9. In the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom, this area was turned into a wasteland of gloom and darkness; it was LIGHTLY ESTEEMED AND HEAVILY OPPRESSED (2 Kngs. 15:29).

BUT ISAIAH WANTS TO SAY: It won't be this way forever! A TIME WOULD COME IN GALILEE, when the people who were walking in darkness would SEE A GREAT LIGHT. Now -- WHERE DID JESUS BEGIN TO PREACH AND TEACH? Matt. 4:13 says, "in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali!" So - in the Assyrian invasion, this territory of Galilee was lightly esteemed and heavily oppressed; there was suffering. But, in this future time of light and joy, THE PEOPLE OF GALILEE WOULD HAVE THIS GREAT LIGHT SHINED UPON THEM - Jesus Christ.

THE STATEMENTS THE PROPHET MADE ABOUT THE MESSIAH IN VERSE 6 It says: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given," then there is this statement: "AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER."

When it speaks of the government being "upon his shoulder," THIS DOESN'T MEAN WHAT WE USUALLY THINK OF; something distasteful; a trouble or burden we wish we didn't have. In Isaiah's day -- kings and rulers often wore some symbol of authority on their shoulder; a golden chain, or article of royal clothing. Placing something ON THE SHOULDER meant to give power or authority to (Isa. 22:22). So when it says, "the government will be upon His shoulder," THIS HAS REFERENCE TO AUTHORITY GIVEN TO CHRIST. The passage indicating fulfillment would be, Matt. 28:18, where Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me, in heaven and on earth."

SO, THOUGH THERE WOULD BE GLOOM AND DARKNESS UPON THE LAND AND UPON THE PEOPLE, A FUTURE TIME WOULD COME, when this Child would be born; when this Son would be given AND THIS PERFECT KING WOULD HAVE ALL AUTHORITY.

Notice what is said about His name:

First, "His name will be called WONDERFUL COUNSELOR." A counselor is a person to whom you can go, for comfort and strength; for help and guidance. In the word "counselor" there is the suggestion of wisdom and knowledge. So, Isaiah is saying: THE MESSIAH WOULD BE A WONDERFUL COUNSELOR.

MIGHTY GOD would be His name. I believe we need to see, in this expression, "a genuine attribution to deity," (Young). Bro. Hailey, in his commentary: "The name MIGHTY GOD identifies the Child with the Godhead, both in deity and in power," (p.#103). In another prophetic passage, Jeremiah says: "He shall be called: JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," (Jer. 23:6).

EVERLASTING FATHER. You may read this as "one who is eternally a Father." Or, you may read this as "the father of eternity," in the sense of - GIVING ETERNAL LIFE. In either case, Jesus is exalted far above the kings and rulers of men (and we have further evidence THIS COULDN'T REFER TO HEZEKIAH).

FINALLY, prince of peace. A RULER, WITH PEACE AS HIS MEANS OF GOVERNING. All through Isaiah, and in the New Testament fulfillment, Jesus is pictured as the great peace-maker; by Him, peace is made between men and God. When a sinner comes to Christ He comes to the single One who can impart real peace; true peace with God.

So the subject of this prophecy is the reign of the Messiah; the nature of that perfect King; the effect of His work - and in revealing these things, Isaiah was giving assurance to the Jews of his day -- that the darkness and gloom that was caused by the Assyrian invasion WOULD NOT LAST FOREVER. A time was coming when a great light would shine in Galilee.

I would remind you - these things were written about 700 years before Christ came. This is a good example of DIVINELY INSPIRED PROPHECY, whereby God revealed history before it happened and these things were fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who took His place on the throne of David over His Kingdom. Today, we have the grand opportunity of being saved and being members of a multiplied nation, a joyous nation and a spiritually armed nation.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 3.9; September 1996

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The People Who Walk In Darkness Shall See A Great Light

Isaiah 9:1-7

It was during times of apostasy and sin that God sent prophets to Israel and Judah. The work of a prophet was to proclaim God's word as the Lord gave it to him through His Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:20,21). This would include the foretelling of future events, though it was not limited to that. Prophets also reminded the people of past events and gave instruction about what they ought to do at the present.

One of the most well known of these prophets was Isaiah. He has come to be known by some as "The Messianic Prophet" because so much of his message had to do with the coming Messiah and His kingdom. In one such section, Isaiah tells of a time to come when a great light will come and shine throughout the land now draped in darkness. This prophecy was fulfilled about seven centuries later by Jesus, of Nazareth, our Messiah and Redeemer. Let us consider Isaiah's text and how it is fulfilled in Jesus. (Isaiah 9:1-7).

From Gloom to Glory

"But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. Thou shalt multiply the nation, Thou shalt increase their gladness; They will be glad in Thy presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For Thou shalt break the yoke of their shoulders and the staff of their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, as in the battle of Midian. For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and the cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, as fuel for the fire." (Isaiah 9:1-5).

One of the most serious thrusts of Isaiah's prophecy is the disloyalty of Judah and Israel to God and His withdrawal of His divine favor from them. But following this judgment, which will bring gloom and anguish to the land, there will be glory. Isaiah even pinpoints the region where the Light will dawn. It would not be in Jerusalem, where one might expect, but rather far to the north, in a region called Galilee. Seven centuries later, this very passage is referred to by the apostle Matthew who tells of Jesus beginning His preaching in Galilee, from Capernaum by the sea (Matthew 4:12-17).

The idea of Jesus as the Light shining forth in the darkness is also a most appropriate description of the

Savior and His gospel. The apostle John tells us that the Light is Jesus; that He is the True Light which comes into the world (John 1:9-13) but that many loved the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19-21) and thus reject God's light, the new spiritual birth into God's family, and eternal life. Instead, loving the evil of darkness, they secure only judgment for themselves; eternal ruin. How much better our lives in this world would be if all came to the light and swept away the darkness!

At the time of the coming of the light, the LORD promised to bless the nation again. He would multiply their blessings and make them glad, as in the time of a bountiful harvest. This most certainly has reference to God's spiritual nation of Israel, His church; and the spiritual riches we have in Christ; and our joy in Him. Our harvest is the "fruit of the Spirit" which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23).

The enemy has always been sin. This cruel oppressor will be defeated as well. Jesus, indeed, lifted the burden of sin from the souls of His people. Sin is no longer our master and instead of the wages of sin, we look forward to the free gift of God; eternal life (Romans 6:1-4; 12-18; 20-23).

A Description of the Messiah

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6). The Messiah came to us first as a child; an infant born in Bethlehem.

He grew into manhood and fulfilled this and all prophecies made concerning Him. Notice the various aspects of His reign:

First, "the government shall rest on His shoulders". Today, in His spiritual kingdom, Jesus has all authority (Matthew 28:18-20). When we obey the gospel, we leave "the domain of darkness" and are transferred into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:12,13).

Second, Jesus has become our "Wonderful Counselor". In the Hebrew, the idea is that His counsel is a thing of wonder and awe. In Jesus' teachings we have the absolute best advice on how to live our lives to be eternally successful. Though the Law came through Moses, "grace and truth comes through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Third, Our Lord Jesus is also our "Mighty God". The word for "mighty" also means "hero" teaching not only the Deity of Christ but also His action in our behalf to save us from doom. He is the greatest hero of all time, for nothing compares to His sacrifice, his love and His power. And He is "Immanuel" which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; Philippians 2:5-11; II Peter 1:1).

Fourth, Jesus is also referred to as "Eternal Father". Jesus, the eternal Word of God, has indeed become our spiritual Father by giving us "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12,13). Jesus also reveals the Heavenly Father to us (John 1:18) and since the Son of God bears His Father's characteristics we can

truly say when we have seen Jesus we have been shown the Father (John 14:8-11).

And Finally, Jesus is the "Prince of Peace". Only He could bring about reconciliation between God and man (II Corinthians 5:18,19). Though faith in Christ brings conflict with the forces of darkness, and sometimes hardships and persecution and betrayal, it also brings harmony with God and a "peace that passes understanding." Even the announcement of the angels at His birth refer to this peace that we may have with God and His goodwill toward us because of the Savior (Luke 2:11-14).

The Messiah's Kingdom

"There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:7). Isaiah then turns from the Messiah to the Messiah's kingdom. There will be no end to the kingdom of Christ. Unlike the nations of earth which come and go; and human governments which are constantly replaced, the kingdom of Christ "cannot be shaken" Hebrews 12:26-29).

Even at the last day, when by the command of God the heavens and earth are shaken and removed, the kingdom of Christ shall stand, and Jesus Himself will deliver it up to the Father in Heaven (I Corinthians 15:24-28).

Jesus is now on His throne, the throne of David, ruling over His kingdom at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-33). His throne is forever; and His "righteous scepter" is in His hand (Hebrews 1:8-9). The zeal of the Lord has indeed accomplished this! It is time to live in the Light! One of the most well known of these prophets was Isaiah. He has come to be known by some as "The Messianic Prophet" because so much of his message had to do with the coming Messiah and His kingdom... Isaiah tells of a time to come when a great light will come and shine throughout the land now draped in darkness. This prophecy was fulfilled about seven centuries later by Jesus, of Nazareth, our Messiah and Redeemer. (Isaiah 9:1-7).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 11.6; June 2004

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What's in a Name?

(Isaiah 9:6)

Some time ago there was a big ruckus in the legal world concerning "truth in advertising". For example, if a product called itself a "pain reliever", then it had to relieve pain. What a concept! Yet sometimes we hear the expression, "What's in a name?" because we know that some things aren't always what they're called. Take my name, Ezekiel, for example. It means literally, "God strengthens". However for many years that was not what I believed. I lived 33 years trying to get my strength from my own devices rather than from where my name says it comes from. Only after God's grace was poured out on me did I realize how true my moniker is!

Let's consider the name of One whose purpose was determined before the beginning of time. The prophet Isaiah told his people in Isaiah 9:6 That someday a Child would be born. One whose name would symbolize the many wonderful aspects of His character. "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

God's prophet foretold that this coming One would give us guidance. He calls Him "**Wonderful Counselor**". The Hebrew word for wonderful is one that is used for the extraordinary or the miraculous, literally full of wonder. "Counselor" was used in terms of a king who guided his people through the consultation of trusted advisors. Thus we have One who would guide through extraordinary, wonderful counsel. Paul the apostle extols the wonder of Jesus in 1 Tim. 3:16: "And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." As for the quality of His counsel, Paul tells us that in Him (Jesus) "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:3). Truly Jesus fulfills this as He guides us even today through His Word. All one has to do is take a look at the changed lives that result from heeding His advice.

Next Isaiah says this coming One would be called "**Mighty God**". The term reveals that not only would He be all-powerful (mighty), but He would also be God Himself! In other words, He would not just have the power of God, He would be the God of power! Paul relied on the God of power when he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil 4:13) in the midst of extreme adversity. We too can lean on this awesome power when we are faced with distress of any kind.

Isaiah then calls the coming One "**Eternal Father**" linking Him conclusively with God who "inhabits eternity" as spoken of in Is. 57:15. In fact, when the Jews proudly told Jesus that they could trace their ancestral roots back to Abraham, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I

AM." (John 8:58) The Jews were infuriated and prepared to stone Jesus because such a statement made Him equal with the God who gave His name as "I AM" to Moses in Ex. 3:14. The Hebrew writer reminds us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Heb. 13:8).

Finally Isaiah describes the coming Messiah as the "[Prince of Peace](#)". One of the many meanings of the Hebrew word "prince" (Shar) is "administrator". Since it's evident that Jesus didn't come to end all wars, the peace He came to administer must have a deeper significance. Peace means literally "joining together" and this is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1). It was Jesus' voluntary, vicarious sacrifice for our sins that made this peace possible as in Is. 53:5 "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." (NIV) He is the One who made peace with God possible and He is the One who keeps us in that peace!

The wonderful majesty of the names of Christ doesn't end there. Matthew tells us that Jesus fulfills the prophecy, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." (Matt. 1:23). John the apostle writes that "..the Word was God" and that "..the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:1, 14) Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus promised, "..I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20) What a thrill to know that the author of our salvation is near when we need Him!

Perhaps the most wonderful name He possesses is that which we call Him by, "[Jesus](#)". The name means "God is my salvation" and was given to Jesus as an infant because "..it is He who will save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21) Without Him and His work on the cross, we would surely have no hope! So, what's in a name? To the many who are being saved by the One who wears the name above all names, the answer is "Everything!" Now the question Jesus asks comes to you, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Well, what do you say?

By Zeke Flores
From Expository Files 11.4, April, 2004

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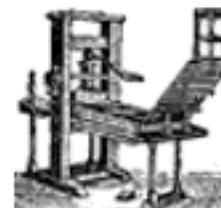


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Bed Too Short, Covers Too Narrow

Isaiah 28:20

"For the bed is too short to stretch out on, and the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself in it" (Isaiah 28:20).

Have you ever been summoned to sleep in a bed that produced such miserable conditions that you found it impossible to rest? What could be more grueling than a bed that is too short and to top it off, barely enough cover to keep it warm?! I remember well as a young person, sleeping at my grandparents house in Comanche, Texas during the winter time. Ma would pile about 5 or 6 home made quilts on top of me and to get warm I would curl up almost into a ball. However, time created heat and I would begin to stretch out only to learn that my feet hung off the bed! (I was a tall boy!). And it was miserable.

There's a spiritual application here. Many times, people who are living contrary to the will of God are made miserable by the teaching and application of his word. People who are living in adulterous relationships are offended and are made miserable by the fact that they are not approved of God because of their compromise and rebellion. As long as his word is preached there is just no place to rest. The same is true for those who teach and practice false doctrine. To hear the plain commands of God is a slap in the face of sectarianism. They will disclaim what they hear, explain it away, and try their hardest to ignore it, but the conscience just won't let it go. It becomes a miserable place to stand when you are on the opposing side to truth. People who are rebuked for supporting abortion are often made to feel uncomfortable for the same reasons. It is cutting to hear that abortion is the legal murder of innocent human beings! People who embrace this barbaric concept of humanity just don't want to hear what God has to say about it. Again, people who are active homosexuals or those sympathetic to this sinful lifestyle are made uncomfortable by the words of Jehovah as he condemned Sodom & Gomorrah and the word of Paul as he details the sins of the Gentile world in Romans 1. They argue and fight against what is taught from God's word by appealing to the heart strings of the general public. They fill our judicial system with law suits and shake their head in disgust to God's condemnation of homosexuality. Nevertheless, it does not change what the truth is.

It may be a big pill to swallow, but God will accept nothing less than man's obedience to his word. It matters not what public opinion or personal persuasion may be. These press on every side of man, and yet, God is the ultimate one we must answer to. "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but he who judges me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

By Tony Ripley
From Expository Files 6.7; July 1999

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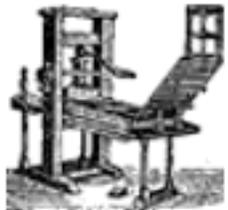
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Comfort, Oh Comfort

Isaiah 40

We serve a powerful God, but we also serve a God who cares about us. The Christian can find comfort in His power. Isaiah chapter 40 is specifically intended to provide a message of comfort because of the power of God.

In Isaiah 39, Isaiah warns Hezekiah of the Babylonian captivity that is soon to come. Isaiah wrote chapter 40 to those people who would soon face that great tribulation as a message of comfort. In 40:27 we read that some of those of the land of Judah felt as though God had not given them justice. Imagine if you were an Israelite born into slavery in a foreign nation. You would hear the amazing stories about the nation of Israel, you were God's chosen people. It would be confusing, and disheartening to look about at your nation's current situation. They would surely wonder if God were still up there. Had He forgotten the people whom He had led out of Egypt?

Isaiah 40:1-2 sounds out like a grand announcement: "Comfort oh comfort, My people, says your God, speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her that her warfare has ended..." As Isaiah begins this message of comfort he speaks about the Word of God, and how it stands. Good news is on its way, a shepherd is coming to guide the flock out from this slavery (40:3-11). It is then that Isaiah begins a description of our God that shows that God could not forget His people. "Who has measured the waters in the Hollow of His hand" (v 12). Take a look around Florida, and all you see is water. I, being from Illinois, have never experienced a hurricane, but I've seen tapes. Water is so vast and powerful. Water is something man can't really control, yet our God holds all of the water in His hand. He "marked off the heavens by the span." God can measure the sky simply by holding His hand and measuring the distance between His thumb and his pinky; it makes your hand seem small. God sits above the earth and sees what is going on (v 22). There is no one we know who we can compare Him with (v 25). Look into the night sky, and know that God has numbered the stars (v 26)!

So you think God has left something out (v 27)? "Do you not know, have you not heard" God is so powerful, do you think He could have left something out? Our God does not have the same limitations we do. When we don't understand, He does; when we are tired, He isn't. If God names the stars, He certainly will not forget His people.

By Nathan E. Quinn
From Expository Files 9.8; August 2002

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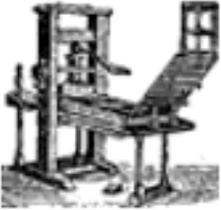
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To Whom Then Will You Liken God?

Isaiah 40:1-31

What people think about God is often very different from how God has revealed Himself to be. But God is real. He is not someone that we can twist and bend into whatever we want Him to be. But that is precisely what many attempt to do today. I recall, for example, a television talk show where homosexuality was being discussed. Someone had referred to what the Bible says about God's attitude toward the practice and one very respected host said, "My God is not like that." Well, since there is only one true and living God, then if her God is not the one who revealed His truth in the Bible, then she has the wrong god. Israel had fallen away from God during Isaiah's time. One of the reasons behind this is that they had forgotten who God was.

Many in our own time have become just as estranged from the true and living God. It is good for believers to remember every day just who God is. We find the answers in His word, the Scriptures. The title of this article is taken from the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, the whole chapter devoted to remembering who God is.

A God That Forgives

"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.... that (their) iniquity has been removed..." (Isaiah 40:1,2). God is holy, pure and righteous. There must be payment made for our sin or we are lost. Jesus sacrificed Himself to atone for our sins. He became "the way" back to the Father (John 14:6). God forgives on His terms, not ours. To reject the gospel is to reject God's forgiveness. Man may try to reinvent a God who forgives through other means than faith in Christ, but in truth there is no other way (Acts 4:12; Acts 3:37,38).

A God That Came

"A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3; see vss. 3-8). God came personally and directly to our world to answer our deepest need. Jesus, the Son of God, was announced by the voice crying in the wilderness, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29). It was about seven centuries after the prophet Isaiah had written these words that the voice of John announced the Lord's presence in the wilderness. The words of Jesus are those by which God speaks to us today (Hebrews 1:1-3). Isaiah placed great confidence in the word of the Lord and so should we. "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8).

A God That Rewards

"Behold, the Lord God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, And His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes." (Isaiah 40:10,11). This is good news and refreshing for the troubled souls of Isaiah's day. But it ought not to be any less refreshing for us as well, but that depends on the amount of faith we have. The Lord will come and His "recompense" or "reward" is with Him. He is not so unjust as to ignore our efforts (Hebrews 6:10). Isaiah uses the figure of a super-shepherd tending His lambs, even carrying them all with a strong, providing and protecting arm. Jesus, in the New Testament, refers to Himself as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

A God of Infinite Power and Wisdom

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance, And the hills in a pair of scales?" (Isaiah 40:12; see vss. 12-17). God is the beginning of all wisdom, knowledge and power. He is the source of the universe. He can do that which is impossible for man to do. God has "pushed the camel through the eye of a needle" with respect to saving us from sin (Matthew 19:24). This means that if we will truly place our trust in Him, then we can be confident and assured about the outcome of our faith - the salvation of our souls. We are in "good hands" when we place ourselves in God's care.

A Jealous God

"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith fashions chains of silver. He who is too impoverished for such an offering Selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter." (Isaiah 40:18-20). The Lord will not accept second place in our lives. He is the Creator. He is not just another idol of wood or stone. He is not just another friend, or possession. He is not a hobby to pursue when we feel like it or a game to play when convenient. He is the living God. As Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 5:24).

A Creator God

"Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power Not one of them is missing." (Isaiah 40:26; see vss. 21-26). At a word God willed the galaxies into existence. At a word He created them, and the day will come when He will remove them because they will have performed their purpose (Psalm 19:1-3; Hebrews 1:10-12; 2 Peter 3:9-13). This God of such dynamic creative ability and power is also aware of every single event in His universe. Jesus said not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice and that we are of more value than sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

A God That Judges

"Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God"? (Isaiah 40:27). People seem to have an idea that God does not see, or that perhaps we can explain our sin away. It's an old idea. God is aware, and will bring every act to

judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

A God That Provides

"Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary." (Isaiah 40:31). There is no good reason to exchange God as He truly is for a god of our own imagination. Our God will provide us with what we need to overcome and win eternal victory. That is something other god can do.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 9.3; March 2002

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Our God is: Aware, Able and Available

Isaiah 40:27-31

"Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God?'

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

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The 40th chapter of Isaiah begins a section of the book that deals primarily with preparing the people of Judah for their Captivity in Babylon. Back in chapter 39, and verse 6, the prophet said to King Hezekiah: "Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord."

Under the impact of this crushing prophecy of doom, those Jews who were still trying to serve the Lord needed encouragement, comfort and assurance. The faithful remnant needed hope, not only when the prophecy was given, in the days of Hezekiah, but also, those who actually endured the calamities of the Captivity; they would need the teaching of these chapters in Isaiah, that they might be consoled by the promises of God. In the dark moments of despair in Babylon; when met by disappointments and face to face with temptations -- the faithful remnant would need the hope and comfort these chapters afforded. Thus it is often observed that the second part of the book of Isaiah begins here in chapter 40, and it was intended to give this assurance to the faithful, in view of the approach of 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

In these verses - Isa. 40:27-31 - the man of God teaches some of the great truths about God; truths that would bring healing to the wounded souls of those who would endure the distress and sorrow of Captivity. I believe this passage is full of practical truth the faithful people of God can depend upon, under any circumstance of suffering, loss and grief.

The text tells us **THREE FUNDAMENTAL THINGS ABOUT THE GOD WITH WHOM WE DEAL:**

1] GOD IS AWARE! To a people tempted to be impatient, forgetful and of little faith Isaiah said: **WHY DO YOU SAY, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God?" Why do you think that way? Why make such a reckless charge?**

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. There is no searching of His understanding."

God is aware! He is aware of that which befalls His people from day to day. We may be surrounded by all manner of unsympathizing hostility. And we may find ourselves tempted to indulge the fretful, distrustful spirit. We may be apt to think, "God has forgotten me ... He has passed me by!"

But whatever our inadequate emotions and reactions may tell us, **GOD IS THERE, AND AWARE.** "The Lord knows the way of the righteous," (Psa. 1:6).

As those Jews went through the dark moments of their Captivity in Babylon and when we go through our times of turmoil, pain and frustration, **WE NEED TO HAVE OUR REMEMBRANCE MOVED AND OUR CONSCIENCE PRICKED.** Our way is not hidden from the Lord!

God is aware.

2] GOD IS ABLE. "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" Isaiah inquires of us. **"THE EVERLASTING GOD, THE LORD, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, NEITHER FAINTS NOR IS WEARY. THERE IS NO SEARCHING OF HIS UNDERSTANDING!"**

One manifestation of the frailty of man is the futile, humanistic practice **OF PROJECTING UPON GOD** the weariness and weakness common to us. We get tired and want to quit, so we figure God gets tired and wants to quit. **WE FIGURE WRONG!**

Jehovah neither faints, nor is weary! There is a vastness about the reach and depth of His power that's overwhelming. It is simply unthinkable, with reference to Him, that he should "faint or grow weary," especially in regard to covenant promises!

Nor, for that matter, is there lack of insight with regard to the issues that confront Him; for "His insight is unfathomable." **"THERE IS NO SEARCHING OF HIS UNDERSTANDING."**

Not only does He not lack strength! **HE SUPPLIES IT.** "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall."

Even young people get tired and faint; some may even "utterly fall." But the Creator, "neither faints, nor is weary."

GOD IS AWARE; GOD IS ABLE.

3] GOD IS AVAILABLE. He is available, to renew the strength of "those who wait" on Him.

In faraway Babylon, there came the news of Cyrus' decree, that the Jews were free to return home. At this news those who had been waiting for Jehovah would soar to heights of joy, as they anticipated a happy homecoming. A rush of preparation for the journey would follow. But, before arriving home, there would be a long trip from Babylon to Jerusalem. YET, with trust in their God, they would mount up with wings like eagles, run and not be weary; walk, and not faint.

So shall it ever be. When first converted to Christ, arising from the waters of baptism, there is the joyous enthusiasm and hope of heaven. We rush to prepare for the journey, soon to discover **A LONG SOJOURN OF TRIALS AND TESTINGS**; temptations, successes, failures; dark days that seem wearisome and monotonous. Yet - for those who wait on Him, God is available to renew their strength ... that they too might mount up with wings like eagles ... run and not be weary; walk, and not faint.

God is available, to renew the strength of those who wait on Him.

One might inquire, "WHAT DOES IT MEAN, TO WAIT ON HIM?" Let us understand that this is not a passive thing, where you do nothing, and ask for everything, then wait for it to be handed to you. That's not waiting for Jehovah. NO! That's pleading with Satan to devour, and take advantage.

To wait on Jehovah means **SINCERE AND STEADY DEPENDENCE ON HIM, WITH AN OBEDIENT TRUST** - and no misgivings about His faithfulness, in doing what He says ... **NOR ABOUT OUR NEED TO OBEY HIM.** Leupold - in his commentary says - "...to 'wait for the Lord,' ... is merely a synonym for faith ... It means to lean heavily on the Lord for strength." **AND THIS CANNOT BE DONE,** without faith and obedience.

We have only to believe on Him, with the commitment of active obedience. And the more threatening and bold the reality of tribulation, the more firmly and desperately we believe on Him.

That's what it means to **WAIT ON THE LORD.** And the prophet testifies: "...those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

As the New Testament would put it --> "...be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," (Eph. 6:10,11).

God is available, for those who wait on Him. **AND - THIS AVAILABILITY** was supremely manifests

by THE SAVIOR. He said: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light," (Matt. 11:28-30).

Conclusion:

So, here these people were (in Judah, in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah), anticipating the overwhelming prospect of exile; captivity in a hostile land.

There would be the temptation to grow weary; to ascribe to God the weakness of man; to charge God with indifference to their plight.

To discourage and hopefully banish that disposition - Isaiah gave them these words (Isa. 40:27-31).

GOD IS AWARE!

GOD IS ABLE!

GOD IS AVAILABLE!

And to us, on this occasion - **THIS MEANS WHAT?**

It means - there is only one place you can find the healing you seek. The wounds of suffering, grief and death can reach deep into the soul. And it may seem like a tremendous burden, at the moment. But if you have a Biblical understanding of the everlasting God, you can find the healing you seek.

And that which we have studied means: **THE CASUAL, MATERIALISTIC, LAZY ATTITUDE TOWARD SPIRITUAL THINGS MUST BE UPROOTED FROM OUR LIVES ... MORTIFIED, REPENTED OF, AND TAUGHT AGAINST!**

Let every day be a time when you look at your own life, consider where you are headed, resolving to make whatever changes the Word of God demands - in spite of the difficulty of repentance! Let us - if need be - re-order our priorities; fully and completely repent of sin; make the necessary confessions -- and return to the Lord, with fresh zeal and faith ...

KNOWING - that our way is not hidden from Him; that He "neither faints nor is weary." He "gives power to the weak ... and He is available to renew the strength of those who wait on Him.

You can run and not be weary; you can walk and not faint; you can mount up with wings like eagles and **SOAR TOWARD THE HOME OF THE SOUL**, but not without faith, coupled with initiative, self-examination, repentance and obedience.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 1.9; September, 1994

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Waiting For The Lord

Isaiah 40:30,31

“Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” (Isaiah 40:30,31).

There is much in the Book of Isaiah that is prophetic in nature. God used Isaiah to speak much concerning the coming of Jesus, which was yet seven centuries in the future. Much of Isaiah is quoted in the New testament showing how these words were fulfilled in Christ. Jesus read from Isaiah in His hometown synagogue and announced the ancient words were being fulfilled during His ministry. The Ethiopian treasurer was reading from Isaiah when Philip began from the Scripture and preached Jesus unto Him.

But note the concept of waiting for the Lord in Isaiah 40:31. This is descriptive of what ought to be the focus and mindset of every Christian.

Patiently Waiting With Endurance

The New Testament often urges Christians to be patient or longsuffering. The idea is to have enduring faith even during difficult times.

A good example of this would be the coming persecution of Christians as well as the destruction of Jerusalem which Jesus warned His disciples about. There would be great loss, and most of His disciples would live to see it all transpire. Jesus encouraged them to endure and promised, "By your endurance you will gain your lives. (Luke 21:19). It is not likely that the life that they would gain was necessarily their physical life here, but rather life everlasting.

We are also told that we need to endure if we are to receive the promises of God; “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.” (Hebrews 10:36; cf. vss. 37-39). We are also told that it is with endurance that we are to run our race (Hebrews 12:1,2). We are reminded of the patience of Job and the rewards that followed (James 5:7-11). We must live patiently by faith until He comes again. His coming is an ever present possibility!

The patience of a Christian, however, is different from the patience of others: it is not as the world gives, but as the Lord gives. How is it different?

First, it is not "waiting something out," but "waiting for the Lord." We live with a wonderful anticipation of seeing Him and being exalted by Him and sharing His glory (1 John 3:1-3). Neither is the motive of our waiting bound to some standard of earthly success. Its purpose is not earthly success, but to cause us to be faithful and pleasing to God rather than returning to our idols.

Patience is "waiting for the Lord." By trusting the Lord, putting the future in his hands, expecting and anticipating God's tomorrow and continuing faithful, we continue in our commitment to Christ. And, we grow ever stronger.

Opportunities To Wait For the Lord

When we are denied that which we want or think we need, it is time to "wait for the Lord".

It is easy to become frustrated when things "don't go our way." People sometimes allow themselves to become cynical about life and its prospects, but not people with living faith. To turn from the Lord during such times is a mistake. To turn to Him is far better.

We recall how Israel's hardships were multiplied when they complained in the wilderness and rebelled (Deuteronomy 8:2-5). They would ever serve as examples of what not to do when the day does not go quite right (1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Hebrews 3,4).

When we are afflicted and do not understand why, it is time to "wait for the Lord". It is a fact of life. We may have to go through affliction and we may be perplexed as to why. Job is used as an example of one who did (James 5:11). He puzzled over extreme hardships that came his way. He simply could not come up with anything that even resembled a good reason as to why the things he had faced had occurred.

The Psalmist once wrote of almost falling away as he contemplated that the wicked seemed to be doing so well while he was afflicted (Psalm 73:1-3). He had wondered if his faith had been in vain (vss. 12-14). But he remembered the end result of the wicked and resolved therefore to be faithful (16-18; 25-28).

When we are doing good, it is time to "wait for the Lord".

There is the patience needed in the evil day, but there is also that which was needed by Elijah on the mountain. "He said, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.'" (1 Kings 19:10). He had worked hard but had not seen the results he had desired from his good work. We need to persevere in doing good during such times. "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." (Galatians 6:9-10).

The rewards of "waiting for the Lord" are many, both now and especially in the world to come. "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:8).

Are you waiting for the Lord? There is both strength and peace in this approach to life. That is good for

now. But in the end, when the kingdom is delivered up to the Father, that is when our reaping will reach wonderful heights far beyond present expectations. Hardly a day will go by when you will not be called upon in some way to wait for the Lord. But in the final scheme of things, It will have been worth the wait.

“Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” (Isaiah 40:30,31).

By Jon W. Quinn
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The Undesirable Jesus

Isaiah 53:3

Isaiah spake of one who had "no form nor comeliness"-"no beauty that we should desire him"-"despised and rejected of men", and "as one from whom men hide their face, he was despised and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53). It may shock some to learn that this is the description of the one identified by inspired men as being Jesus, the Son of God and Saviour of men. But such is the case for both Philip, the evangelist, and John, the apostle, and others so apply the prophecy. In answer to the eunuch's question, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?", Philip preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:34,35). John quoted Isaiah 53: 1, "lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed" along with Isaiah 6:10 and then stated, "These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him" (John 12:41). When Isaiah spake the things recorded in Isaiah 53, "he spake of him" (Jesus). Thus both Philip and John interpret the prophecy as fulfilled by Jesus.

Jesus is not now, nor has he ever been, despised and rejected because of any flaw in himself. He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (I Peter 2:22); he was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15); his public challenge was "which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46); and Pilate's verdict was, "I find no crime in him" (John 18:38). God from heaven declared "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Cumulative evidence to the same point abounds in the scriptures but this will suffice to prove the proposition that Jesus is not despised and rejected due to any personal defect.

Why?

But why is there no form or comeliness, no beauty that we should desire him? Why is he despised and rejected of men? As the fault is not in Jesus, we must search for the answer by an investigation of man. Jesus is not attractive to the worldly-minded. Neither materialism, sensualism, pride nor any other thing which sets the mind on "the things which are upon the earth" can discover beauty in Jesus. The "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life" blind those in their clutches to the superior beauty of Jesus. "When we see him" through lust-tinted glasses, "there is no beauty that we should desire him."

The "many" who are traveling the road to destruction are doing so because of their ignorant insensitiveness to the "beauty of holiness". When those who trust in numbers observe that the majority despise Jesus, they adopt the attitude of the many and come to despise Jesus and despising Jesus, they join the crowd. Jesus must be rejected in order for one to "go with the crowd". Pride, confidence in self, prevents personal conviction of sin. And until such conviction of personal guilt exists, one could hardly

"care less" that "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities."

Lacking conviction of sin, conviction of righteousness, and conviction of judgment, man cannot see Him in His beauty. Conviction of sin, that "all have sinned", is indispensable to one's appreciating how beautiful and desirable Jesus is. For when a person is aware that he is lost in sin, he is eager for the one who is "able to save...all who come unto God by him". Nothing can be more desirable. The realization of the fact and ugliness of personal guilt leads to appreciation of the beauty of Jesus, the one "by whose stripes we are healed". Coupled with the conviction of sin, and just as indispensable is the conviction of righteousness. God through the Holy Spirit justified Christ by raising him from the dead, thus refuting the charge of unrighteousness implied by his death on the cross, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God...by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that he was "with God elect, precious". Seeing him as the Son of God, we are not dismayed at the realization that the world despises and rejects him. Rather than dismay there will be boldness to rely on him to justify all who come unto God by him. Our Lord also included the conviction of judgment in his statement of what the Holy Spirit would accomplish when he came to the apostles. Conviction of the defeat and punishment of the prince of this world, along with all of those who follow him, makes Jesus extremely desirable. The attractiveness of Satan wanes as one views the destiny of Satan and his admirers.

The Other Side

Men must come to regard meekness and lowliness of heart as strengths rather than weaknesses before Jesus has beauty and comeliness for them. Jesus said, "Come unto me all ye that labor 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 soul..." (Matt. 11:28-30). Until a person realizes that the burden of his soul is sin, that the feeling of lack of fulfillment, the anxieties, the feeling of insecurity, and all the other elements that contribute to making life miserable are part of the burden of sin; in other words, until he is conscious of personal guilt he will not seek the relief of soul offered by Christ.

Overwhelming awe accompanies awareness of the glory of Jesus. The wisdom of the world rejects the idea that "glory" is compatible with meekness and lowliness of heart. If pride and highmindedness were characteristics of Jesus, the invitation to "come unto me..." would never have issued from His lips. But such is not the case for Jesus explains, "I am meek and lowly in heart". The magnificent beauty of the Son of God will not awe anyone, to the point of repelling him, when he has the assurance of the one who is "acquainted with grief", that he is "meek and lowly in heart".

According to Isaiah Jesus "was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted, he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). The Holy Spirit spake by Peter, saying, "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you...who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. 2:21-23). Such reaction to oppression does not appeal to the proud and arrogant. This is not, according to their view, "the stuff of which heroes are made". They rather applaud the person who when he is reviled, reacts with bitterness, expressed in "four letter words". Isaiah explained why Jesus "was despised and rejected of men..." this way: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way..." (Isaiah 53:6). All who are straying around, following their own way are blinded to the beauty of Jesus; they fail to see in Jesus anything that

is desirable.

Few are they that acknowledge in thought, word and deed, that "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). All who are in the world and many who are listed as members of the Lord's church have never learned the lesson that, "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

That the Ethiopian saw comeliness and beauty in Jesus that caused him to desire him, is evident from his action of being baptized, by the authority of Jesus for the remission of his sins. He did not despise and reject; he believed and was baptized and then went on his way rejoicing in the beauty of holiness.

How do you rate Jesus?

By Robert H. Farish; (From Vanguard, April, 1975)
From Expository Files 9.11; November 2002

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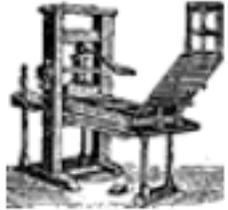
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"Repairer of the Breach"

Isaiah 58:9-12

It was about 700 B.C. Because the people had fallen away, and despite the calls issued by prophets sent by God to them to repent and to return to the Lord, the people of the land, for the most part, continued to ignore the righteousness and justice of God. Because of this, the nation would suffer great losses at the hands of cruel enemies. But there was hope; hope that tragedy would give way to repentance; a seeking for God and a spiritual renewal. The prophet Isaiah, in the midst of national turmoil, said this: "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, And if you give yourself to the hungry, And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom will become like midday. And the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell." (Isaiah. 58:9-12).

Today, as then, a great and necessary part of our security as a nation is a strong moral and spiritual foundation. Without that, of what use is it to try and save the structure if the foundation is weak? Men and women of faith who love their nation and the righteous principles upon which it was built are not ashamed to look to God for strength and guidance, not only in times of stress and tragedy, but also on good days of prosperity and joy.

Rebuild With God

There are often calls to rebuild in times of destruction and tragedy. When such destruction comes as a result of efforts by evil men, there is also justified anger that accompanies the sorrow and resolve. All these emotions are understandable.

Also, to be admired during such times, are qualities such as courage, generosity and compassion. These are good qualities; qualities that ought to belong to us all. They are Christ-like, and as disciples of Christ we ought to have the faith upon which these qualities can be ours and grow.

But without dependence upon God, a nation who pledges to rebuild after disaster is rather arrogant. In recent years, some of the very source of our national strength has been sapped by unrighteous government leaders. In a nation where the prime time media constantly belittles moral and spiritual principles found in the Scriptures of God, the very foundation has been undermined. God cannot be

mocked! As Thomas Jefferson once asked, "Do we think that His righteousness will sleep forever?" He felt far too little attention was being paid by our nation's leadership to the justness of God.

Ingredients For Success

The Bible records times men have sought to rebuild without God. Tom Daschle, Senate majority leader, quoted from Isaiah concerning the rebuilding process in our own nation's present tragedy. He picked an unfortunate passage, evidently not understanding that the context is very negative. He quoted Isaiah 9:10. The context reads this way: "The Lord sends a message against Jacob, And it falls on Israel. And all the people know it, That is, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, Asserting in pride and in arrogance of heart: 'The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with smooth stones; The sycamores have been cut down, But we will replace them with cedars.'" (Isaiah 9:8-10). He only quoted the final part (starting with "The bricks...", not bothering to notice that this was an obstinate statement made by the faithless that they were going to rebuild apart from God. He probably did not even know, and probably few people do, but certainly one of his speech writers needs a good talking to.

The nation of Edom also had the idea that they would rebuild. The Lord said that, because of their wickedness, He would not allow their rebuilding be successful. He said, "Though Edom says, 'We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins'; thus says the Lord of hosts, 'They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.'" (Malachi 1:4).

The point is not that our nation should not respond to tragedy with compassion, courage and resolve; of course we should! But rather, that we should rebuild on the same foundation upon which our founding fathers built; principles of righteousness, justice and faith recognized as universally true because we are creatures of a righteous and just Creator. "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people." (Proverbs 14:34). It takes more than lip service to God during times of tragedy to be truly blessed by Him.

Repairing the Breach

There will be massive efforts to rebuild from the ruins after tragedy. As we saw, Isaiah referred to the success of those who rebuild when their efforts are combined with faith and righteousness. He said, "And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell." (Isaiah 59:12).

For repairing injured bodies, physicians, nurses and medical know-how are needed. For repairing ruined buildings, contractors, steelworkers and engineers are needed. For protecting freedom, military and civil law enforcement personnel are needed. For good and righteous civil laws, there is need for good and righteous civil lawmakers and judges. Our nation certainly needs all these things.

But it is not enough if our nation is to be as great as it can be. To work upon the moral and spiritual foundation upon which something good can be built, where would the workers be found?

If you are a faithful disciple of Christ, that would be you, standing for truth and righteousness every day.

In short, it is up to each Christian (and it always has been) to live for Christ in a meaningful and dedicated way each day. Just as a doctor needs to be committed to his work in healing the injured, the Christian needs to be dedicated to his or her faith in order to be useful in his or her field; which is the field of discipleship (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Jesus once said, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." (John 4:35). Look around. They still are! Will you be called a "repairer of the breach"?

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 9-4; April 2002

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Exposition Of Isaiah 59

Isaiah 59

When you think of the Old Testament book of Isaiah, your first thoughts may be, his marvelous prophecies of the Messiah and the future glory of God's kingdom. Indeed, that is a prevailing theme in the prophecy of Isaiah. It is challenging, fascinating and edifying to spend hours in a study of those passages - then go to the New Testament and see those things fulfilled in the coming of Christ, His life, suffering death and exaltation to the right hand of God.

There are other things in Isaiah that demand our attention and one thing is this: God had given Isaiah the responsibility of telling the people of their sin. Isaiah does this in some detail in chapter one; then comes back to this theme at various places in the book.

One of the best statements of this is found in Isa. 58 and verse 1 - "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet ...," and God said: "Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

Now that's in Isa. 58:1. I want to call our attention to the next chapter, Isa. 59. I want us to see what this passage says about God, and what it says about sin. We need to know there is no indifference in God, but no hope for man without God's remedy.

And God's remedy for man's lost condition is declared at the end of the chapter. I'd like for us to make a little journey through the chapter, in the hope we will learn these things and behave with trust and love for God, and the Savior who came in His name.

One of the first things Isaiah teaches us in this chapter is - **THERE IS NO WEAKNESS OR INABILITY ON THE PART OF GOD AT ALL.** "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear." All through the prophesy of Isaiah he described the problem between God and His people ... but never was there any hint that the problem was on God's end!

Sometimes in human relations, and in marriage in particular, both parties are at fault; so we are familiar with that, and we may be tempted to think in those terms. But in the Bible when the problem between God and man is described, it can never be argued that both parties are at fault.

God has no fault, no weakness, no handicap. The problem is not that his hand is too short to reach us or that His ear is not able to hear us. There is no fault, no weakness on the part of the Lord - and that's the

prophet's point in verse 1: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear."

The problem is man's tragic weakness, due to the choice to sin and that is described by Isaiah beginning with verse 2. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

The problem is not that God cannot hear; that He is deaf. **THE PROBLEM IS, "He will not hear."** He will not hear because of their iniquities and sins. **THEY HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THE LORD INTO SIN.** The distance was created by man - by man's sin.

It might be illustrated like this: if you walk away from me, and try to talk to me - I cannot hear you ... not because I have a hearing problem, but because you walked away; you created the distance. Isaiah had made a point about this back in chapter one -- "Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear," (1:15). So here in Isa. 59 - the problem is described **AND IT IS SIN**, separating man from God.

Continuing with verse 3, if you'll look down through the passage, Isaiah is specific in identifying their sins:

VIOLENCE AND LYING: "...your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity." Mic. 7:3 - "Their hands are upon that which is evil, to do it diligently," and in Mic. 7:2 - "They all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net."

LACK OF INTEGRITY: "No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity." In Verse 5, the people are depicted as snakes giving birth to more snakes and breeding death. What a catastrophe, where a society is filled with violence and perversity, and **NOBODY STANDS UP AND CALLS FOR JUSTICE.** Nobody has the conscience and courage to plead for truth. "They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity."

THEY HAD NO SHAME: "Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands." The purpose of a garment is to cover. And in the Old Testament - the ideas of covering and atoning were very closely allied in Hebrew thought. Here the prophet teaches, men were making some attempt to cover their sins, but with garments no better than spider webs! These people would conceive evil, engage in perversity and violence, then offer burnt offerings to try and cover the sin they had chosen. Their sin remained - standing between them and God.

THEY WERE GUILTY OF MURDER; SHEDDING INNOCENT BLOOD: "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." Where there was some opportunity to do evil, these people would rush to do it, full speed ahead. What a sorry thing that men have nothing better to do, than to wait around for word of some evil to do ... some blood to shed ... some life to destroy.

INJUSTICE, in verse 8. "They way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways;

they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace." Did you see the movie, **THE APOSTLE**, where Robert Duvall plays the role of a preacher who is filled with himself, promotes himself and doesn't study or teach any Bible at all... at one point in the movie He prays, "Lord, give me peace," -- he says "Amen," and then continues in his crooked path. Sometimes people who have really messed up their lives will wonder out loud - **WHY CAN'T I HAVE PEACE IN MY LIFE**; why do I have all this chaos, trouble and conflict. Isaiah says, "they have made themselves crooked paths."

Do you see here where the problem was? There was and is no weakness at all in God. In fact, God is ready to forgive; the problem is, **SINNERS WHO ARE NOT READY TO BE FORGIVEN**. The problem is this wall of separation between man and God, which is man's iniquity and sin - vividly set forth in this passage.

Continuing with verse 9 - this word "therefore" introduces the consequences, and there are more confessions.

"Therefore, justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us ..." Here is justice (in fellowship with God) - but we have walked away from it. Here is righteousness (in fellowship with God) - but we have gone the other way. Do we think that justice will catch up with us, or that righteousness will overtake us? Isaiah denies that hope - justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us!

Then - beginning with the middle of verse 9 and on down through verse 11 - **A SERIES OF CONFESSIONS**, and Isaiah takes part in this! He doesn't stand above the people and claim no participation, or sinless perfection. He had said, back in chapter six - "Woe is me, for I am undone." So here in chap. 59 - beginning in the middle of verse 9 - **THESE CONFESSIONS**:

We look for light, but there is darkness.

We walk in blackness.

We grope for the wall like the blind,
and we grope as if we had no eyes;
we stumble at noonday as at
twilight; we are as dead men in desolate
places.

We growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves;
we look for justice, but there is none;
for salvation, but it is far from us."

This is the sad condition people get themselves into through the crooked path of sin, described here in Isaiah 59. He said in verse 12 about the people of God in Judah - "our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them." The prophet is so clear about all of this, that God is not the problem, man is. And as a consequence of man's sin... Truth had fallen in the streets. Those who sought to do right were oppressed and harassed. Verse 15 says - the Lord saw this, and was displeased that "there was no justice."

Now notice how Isaiah describes the problem
Beginning in verse 16...

God saw that THERE WAS NO MAN, "no intercessor." Earlier in the history of this nation, there were intercessors: Moses, Joshua, David. But with these people Isaiah was writing about - in that time - God saw "no intercessor."

So, He took matters into His own hands. The last part of verse 16 says: "Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him." Jehovah would act personally, depending on none other than Himself and His own arm of strength to intercede and bring His people into a right relationship with Him. God would uphold His own cause and His own righteousness **DIRECTLY, WITHOUT INTERCESSORS.**

And the next picture is - God, putting on His armor for battle:

For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, Fury to His adversaries, Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay. So shall they fear The name of the LORD from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.

This was during the age before Jesus came and this was God's response to the sin Isaiah has described. It was a response of justice and vengeance. It was - verse 18 says - According to their deeds. It involved recompense to His enemies.

I don't know exactly how God did this, or exactly when God did this. This chapter may be a general statement about the sin of the people and God's response in such a time. But whatever the historical interpretation or the situation - **GOD WON THIS BATTLE** and those who allowed the truth to fall **LOST THE BATTLE.**

Now there was a time when there was no Intercessor, and God took matters directly into hand - but after that, there was another time - when God sent a redeemer.

Verse 20 -- "The Redeemer will come to Zion."

This is Christ, the Messiah; and everything in Isaiah 59; everything in verses 1-19 demonstrate the need for a redeemer. The theme of the chapter is "your iniquities have separated you from your God." These separating iniquities are described in some detail.

God saw no Intercessor. God took action against the transgressors and then said: The Redeemer will come. Jesus came to Zion; He was born into and came to the Jewish nation. The gospel was preached to the Jews, then to the Greeks. This was in fulfillment of Jesus instructions: "Go ye into all the world ... make disciples of all nations."

This is what Isaiah was pledged to preach; this covenant or promise God made - that this Redeemer would come; so the last two verses of Isa. 59 read.

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the LORD. "As for Me," says the LORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

That's Isaiah 59 and I want to make three simple points for us to consider:

#1 - Sin Has The Same Effect Today, it separates us from God.

We cannot disregard God; walk in disobedience and ignore His instructions and think it has no impact with Him, or that it doesn't matter. Nobody has ever said this as plainly as the apostle John - when he wrote:

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. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 Jno. 1:6-10).

This is very simple --> FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD DEPENDS UPON WALKING IN THE LIGHT! If we walk in darkness - NO FELLOWSHIP. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light - FELLOWSHIP. The people Isaiah wrote about and prophesied to were walking in darkness, had no fellowship with God and so THEIR SINS SEPARATED THEM FROM GOD. Sin has the same effect today.

#2 - When A Nation Or People Turn From God, They Turn To Lies.

Verse 4.

No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

Micah said, about the heads and rulers of the house of Jacob -- They abhor justice, and pervert all equity (Mic. 3:9). You cannot turn from God, and expect to bear the fruit of righteousness and that's true for an individual, a group or nation. When you turn from God, you turn to lies.

#3 - There Is No Covering, No Atonement and No Solution To This Problem EXCEPT THE REDEEMER, JESUS CHRIST.

Once you sin yourself away from God you cannot cover yourself; you cannot pardon yourself; you cannot dig yourself out of that pit! You cannot weave together some sort of web that will eliminate the sin or hide it.

Jesus is the only answer, the only solution, and the only Savior. There is no organization that can save you. No religious leader, past or present. No human plan. The wall of sin we create between us and God cannot be destroyed by anyone, except the one John was talking about when he said - "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The prophet Isaiah was faithful to carry out his mission - to tell, to declare the sins of the people and, to tell of the redeemer who would come. From this chapter we learn about God ... about sin ... about the effect of sin ... man's vain efforts to cover it - and God's answer to the whole problem in the Redeemer who came. Let us be sure we have not separated ourselves from God - but if we have - let's do the only thing that can be done, in surrendering to the Redeemer and serving Him with a whole heart.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 6.4; April 1999

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Before You Were Born

Jeremiah 1:5-10

Jeremiah was a prophet of God who began his work in 627 B.C. and continued until he was taken to Egypt in about 587 B.C. During his lifetime he saw the Assyrians, once powerful and dreaded enemies of Israel and Judah, crumble and fall. He warned of coming disaster due to the infidelity of the people. He saw his prophecies fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Babylon.

During his service as a prophet, as he pled with the people to repent and warned of the consequences for failure. He was branded as a traitor by ungodly kings. He foretold that captivity in Babylon after the defeat of Judah would last for seventy years. It would be long after his death, when the seventy year had been fulfilled, that yet unborn foreign kings would allow a remnant return to rebuild Jerusalem, just as Jeremiah had said.

Jeremiah did not want to be a prophet. It is interesting that many of God's prophets were not at all eager to become prophets. Moses had objected that he was not eloquent enough. Isaiah had interjected that he was only a man of unclean lips. Jonah ran the opposite direction when God told Him to go preach in Nineveh. Jeremiah, too, is not seeking the office of prophet when the Lord calls him. We shall consider some points about God choosing Jeremiah and relate them to our own lives as disciples today.

Appointed By God

"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.'" (Jeremiah 1:5). There are several things here that are wonderful and awe-inspiring as we reflect on what this verse says about the omniscience of God. God tells Jeremiah that He "knew" him before he was formed within the womb. He already knew Jeremiah's strengths and weaknesses. He already knew that Jeremiah would possess what God wanted to use during this particularly trying time of Israel's history. And before Jeremiah was born, God had already set him aside for a special task which He would give him years later as a young adult.

What does this mean to us? After all, we are not prophets like Jeremiah. No, but we are human beings created in God's image like Jeremiah. God knew each of us; what our strengths and weaknesses; abilities and limitation would be. He knew us in this way even before we were born. He has also appointed us to become like Jesus as we follow in His steps; "For whom He foreknew He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." (Romans 8:29). It is up to us as to whether we will accept God's appointment or not, just as it was up to Jeremiah.

Excuses Will Not Do

"Then I said, 'Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak because I am a youth.'" (Jeremiah 1:6). I suppose that Jeremiah was staggered by the responsibility of God's appointment. He obviously took it very seriously, but he was dealing with the One who knew him better than he knew himself. Jeremiah was saying that he was not sure that he could do the job. But God had already answered that objection. God knew what Jeremiah could do, and had known from even before Jeremiah had been born!

Likewise, I am sure that sometimes we may feel the same way. When facing terrible times we wonder if we will make it. Can we maintain our faith? Can we possibly succeed when all seems to be going against us? Will we be able to get back up if we falter? God knows we can and has assured us so. There quite simply is no excuse for failing to become what we ought to be in whatever circumstance we may face.

Trust In God And His Word

"But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am a youth' But everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak.'" (Jeremiah 1:7). Jeremiah contended that he was only a youth. That may well have been, but God is eternal. To put it simply, Jeremiah's duty was to obey God. The power was God's, not Jeremiah's. The word to be delivered would not be the words of a youth, but of God.

The Lord commanded that Jeremiah to go where he would be sent and to speak that which the Lord would command him. Likewise with disciples today, we must never set aside God's mission for us. To contend that we lack the ability to live as God commanded is to express doubt in our Creator's wisdom. To set aside His word in favor of the creeds of men is to reject His Lordship. When men begin to direct their own steps, their course leads to failure (Jeremiah 10:23).

Fear Has No Place

"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,' declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:8). Our sinful world has never welcomed those who would teach the truth, bowing to no worldly pressure. Jesus said to His disciples, "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who endures to the end who will be saved" (Matthew 10:22). Later, as Jesus spoke with His apostles shortly before His arrest, He foretold how they would soon be scattered into the night to leave Jesus alone with His captors. He said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The Word Has Been Delivered

"Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, 'Behold I have put My words in your mouth.'" (Jeremiah 1:9). When we preach and teach and live what the Bible says, then we do not need to be wondering if we are right or not. This is because the Scriptures come to us from the mind of God (II Timothy 3:16,17). Truth has already been settled; not in a human court or council, but in heaven.

When Jeremiah spoke by inspiration, the words came to him by God's Spirit. This is how God chose to

reveal His will to us; through inspiring selected individuals with His Spirit. Today we have the completed Scriptures as our guide containing the words written and spoken by those upon whom the Lord had "stretched out His hand" and touched their mouths. When we teach these things, we are then speaking "as the oracles of God" (I Peter 1:20,21; I Peter 4:11).

The Work Which We Must Do

"See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10). This well sums up our mission today as proclaimers of Gods word. Sometimes, when confronting error, we must "pluck up" and "break down." At other times we must speak so as to "build" and to 'plant." Our work is incomplete if it is all "breaking down" because our mission requires building. Also, our work is lacking if we are only "building" because there are things which need to be "plucked up."

I've heard of preachers being accused of being "too positive" and of others as being "too negative". No doubt some of the charges are true. Some might err in judgment in this regard and be too positive or too negative. But the discerning mind knows that there is room for both in the Kingdom today. Our mission is to make known the will of the Lord and His salvation in Jesus. For this we have been appointed. The Lord has said that we are equipped for the task and that He will help us. Let us get on with the work we have been given to do.

By Jon W. Quinn
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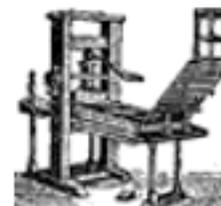


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"An Appalling and Horrible Thing"

Jeremiah 5:30-31

It was written by Jeremiah, a prophet to lived in another time and in another land. He was speaking out against the corrupt leaders of the land, and the people to whom moral and spiritual corruption no longer mattered. Jeremiah, guided by God's Spirit, said, "**An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and priests rule by their own authority, and My people love to have it so! But what will you do at the end of it?**" (Jeremiah 5:30,31).

Earlier, God had chastised the nation's leaders and its people with these words: "Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken Me and sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the harlot's house. They were well fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. 'Shall I not punish these people,' declared the Lord, 'and on a nation such as this shall I not avenge Myself?'" (Jeremiah 5:7-9).

Because of this great travesty, the Lord said, "So the house of Israel is shamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests and their prophets." (Jeremiah 2:26).

Some points to consider: First, the people were no longer holding their leaders accountable on issues of morality and character. At one time they would have, but no more. When this change of attitude occurred, the nation was doomed to be led by the unscrupulous, the dishonest and the depraved. But, after all, these leaders sure did know how to have a good time! Isn't that what is important?

Second, though the Lord had richly blessed the nation in the past, because of its present immorality and lack of spirituality, He was withdrawing His care. The prosperity of the nation would soon be lost, indeed, already it was beginning to decline. Greed and selfishness had replaced nobler ideals when character issues no longer mattered to the people.

What were the religious leaders doing through all this? They were as much involved in the disloyalty to God and His laws as were the secular leaders. They would voice their support of the immoral, and ridicule Jeremiah and others who called for a return to God's laws. They were false prophets and corrupt priests, called upon to support ungodliness of all kinds. Smooth words and flattering lips typified the popular sermons of the day. Blatant sin was ignored.

Jeremiah said the nation was shamed because of these matters. Well, all this took place centuries ago, in another time and place. Aren't we fortunate to live in our own time and place where such events and circumstances are so far removed from us? Yeah, right.

By Jon W. Quinn
The Final Page
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"Stand in the Ways and See"

Jeremiah 6:16

"Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.' But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"
- Jeremiah 6:16

This simple verse provides all kinds of insight into how we might learn to be pleasing to God. Consider:

"Stand in the ways and see." If you want to learn anything, you have to go where the information is - to "stand in the way" where that knowledge travels. If you were interested, for example, in improving your math skills, signing up for an English class at the junior college would not be the best means of going about it. English class is not the place to stand if you want to learn about math. You have to enroll in a math class, because that's where math knowledge is being distributed.

Once in the right place, you have to "see," to open your eyes to the instruction. Most of us learn very little by osmosis - that is, by simply absorbing knowledge into our brains out of the thin air around us. If you wanted to learn more about math, just being in a math class would avail you little unless you opened the textbook, studied the lessons, and did the homework exercises contained therein. That's how you learn.

"Ask for the old paths." Learning is almost always facilitated by getting instruction from someone who has been studying the subject longer than you have. You might be able to teach yourself mathematics, but you'd gain knowledge much more quickly by studying with a knowledgeable math teacher, or perhaps even another student who had already taken the class and would be willing to tutor you. And fortunately for you, mathematicians have been kicking numbers around for thousands of years, so everything you want to know about math is already out there in "the old paths" of math instruction - you just need to ask someone to show you where to look.

"Where the good way is." Here's where matters get complicated. If you want to learn math, even enrolling in a math class, studying diligently, and making use of the available instruction isn't enough. The problem is, there are excellent math teachers and poor math teachers. If you get tutored by someone who knows as little about math as you do - or even worse, "knows" a great deal that is incorrect - you could find yourself no better off than you started, or worse, hopelessly confused.

You need to seek out a good math teacher, someone who really knows his or her stuff, who understands

the subject material backward and forward, and will teach you "the good way" as it pertains to mathematics.

"And walk in it." Your long-term success in your math studies depends upon your putting into action what you learn. I took two years of algebra and a year of geometry in high school, and another semester of algebra in college. Can I work an algebra or geometry problem today? No - a math textbook reads like hieroglyphics to me today, because I haven't used any higher math in a quarter-century or longer. I didn't "walk in it," so the learning all those years ago did me no practical good at all.

The Spiritual Application

What is true of mathematics, as we've been discussing the subject here, is even more true of spiritual truth. If we want to know more about God, we have to "stand in the way" where the knowledge of God and His will exists, and "see" what is there to be discovered. We can't make it up as we go along; rather, we must "ask for the old paths" and be instructed in what God revealed long ago in His word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We must make certain we are taught in "the good way," and the only way to do that is by comparing what we are taught with the scriptures (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1). As we learn from God's written word, we must implement the wisdom we learn, and "walk in it" (Luke 11:28; James 1:22). When we apply ourselves to this plan, we will truly find rest for our souls.

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By Michael D. Rankins
From Expository Files 12.2; February 2005

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Remember Shiloh!

Jeremiah 7:1-7

In the days of Jeremiah (ca. 600 B.C.), the people of Judah faced difficult times. The northern kingdom of Israel was history, taken into Assyrian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had defeated Assyria, and was making his way into Judah.

The people of Judah had developed a false trust. They were placing their confidence and hopes everywhere but the place where it would have done them some good. It is through the prophet Jeremiah that the Lord condemns as useless the false hopes created in the hearts of the people of Judah by the leaders.

It is still possible today to put our hope and confidence in the wrong place. We would do well to avoid making the same critical mistake as Judah did. We read of that false trust and how the Jehovah responded to it in the seventh chapter of Jeremiah.

The False Trust of Judah

First, the people placed their confidence in the temple buildings themselves (vss. 1-7). The Lord responded, "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'" (Jeremiah 7:4).

The people were under the impression that the mere fact that the temple was located in Jerusalem would spare the city. The Lord sent Jeremiah to the temple itself to preach that it would take genuine repentance to reverse the situation (Jeremiah 7:1-7).

Then, as now, Lord required more than rituals involving temple worship and outward piety. Repentance would mean not only true-hearted worship of the Lord, but also a change in how the people treated one another; that their dealings were to be just and honorable and without oppression.

Second, they sought to excuse their obvious sins (Jeremiah 7:8-11). Again, theirs was a false trust in that they were being led to think that they could sin and not be held accountable. "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail" (Jeremiah 7:8). After committing transgression, they would go to the

temple thinking that would absolve them: "...then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, "We are delivered!" -- that you may do all these abominations?" (Jeremiah 7:10). The Lord could see through such hypocrisy and responds by saying that this, too, is a false hope. He says, "Remember Shiloh!" - (Jeremiah 7:12).

Shiloh is where the tabernacle had stood before the temple had been built at Jerusalem, and was at that time the center of the worship unto Jehovah (Joshua 8:1). The ark of the covenant was there. Somehow, the people had gotten the idea that if the ark was physically present with them, that they were invincible. They were not faithful to the Lord in their conduct and service, but they had the "magical" ark, so they would prevail in battle against the Philistines.

They were wrong about that. It was at Shiloh where the ark of the covenant had been captured by the Philistines and the unfaithful people of Israel defeated (1 Samuel 4:10-11). It was as if they believed that the ark was like a lamp and God was a genie inside enslaved to whoever possessed the ark. That was certainly a mistake.

Jeremiah warns that God would do likewise with Jerusalem and the temple- (Jeremiah 7:13-15). That is, just as He had withdrawn His protection from Shiloh and allowed the ark to be captured, He would withdraw His protection from the temple and allow it to be captured as well. This because of Judah's failure to heed His prophets - (vs. 13).

Similar False Trust Today

Could we have a false trust as "members" of the church which Christ built? Are some like the Judeans who cried "The Temple of the Lord..." but did not give themselves fully and loyally to the Lord and His service? There may be those who cry "The Church of Christ..." behaving as if membership will cover over negligence and inactivity. It may be that some think as long as they are members of a faithful church that they are secure. But the Bible says that judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17) and the parable of the tares also tells us that such attitudes are misguided (Matthew 13:41-43).

The fact is, salvation is dependent on individual faith and loyalty, not by the crowd with whom we may be associated. While it is true that our associates may have an effect on what kind of character we develop, each one of us will be judged as an individuals and not by group allegiance or association! - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Do some, like the Judeans, who disobeyed God, then claimed exemption, do likewise today? Living in and of the world part of the time, and then going to "church"? Do we find ourselves participating in worldliness in our manner of speech, conduct and/or style of dress but think of ourselves as being "faithful members" because we "go to church" the way they went to the temple?

Today, as then, God is a God of grace, but his grace instructs us to live holy (Titus 2:11,12). There is no sacrifice made for those who willfully transgress God's law (Hebrews 10:23-31). Salvation is dependent

upon God's grace, not church ritual!

The Lord's responded to the folly of such a false trust: As they were once told, "Remember Shiloh!" let us "Remember Sardis!" (Revelation 3:1-6). They had "a living name", but that did not free them from the threat of condemnation - (vss. 1-3). As always, salvation was based on individual consecration (vss. 4-6).

To the folly of such a false trust we could also answer: "Remember Laodicea!" (Revelation 3:14-22). They had become "lukewarm" - (vss. 14,15). They were in danger of expulsion because of worldliness - (vss. 16,17). They were in need of repentance; full and complete repentance. (vss. 18-22).

Like Judah whose salvation from destruction depended upon wholehearted service to God, so our salvation depends on complete and faithful obedience to the will of Christ! We must avoid the fallacy of "virtue by association", and remember that God has promised to do to us just as He did to Israel if we are not faithful - (see Romans 11:20-22). This is a call to personal commitment and endeavor. It is not enough to be associated with the faithful... each of us must become one of God's faithful.

Note: Many thanks to my friend Mark Copeland for doing a sermon outline upon which many of the thoughts in this article are based

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.3; March 2006

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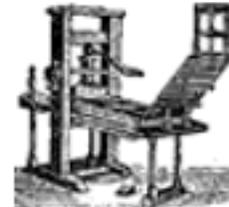


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The Empty Boast Of Hypocrites

Jeremiah 7:9,10

One of the greatest prophets during the Old Testament era was Jeremiah. His mission was to testify to a sinful and stubborn people who were misled by false prophets. He saw the nation pass from the prosperous conditions during the time of Josiah to a state of iniquity and ruin under the last four kings of Judah. Israel, the northern kingdom, had already been carried away into captivity. Judah stood alone against her enemies. Babylon and Egypt were struggling for world power. It was a time of wickedness and doom and the Lord called this young man to preach repentance to the people of Judah.

Here is part of what the prophet preached, in Jeremiah 7:1-20.

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!'" Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, "if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, "then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

"Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, "and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD. "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. "And now, because you have done all these works," says the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, "therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. "And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren--the

whole posterity of Ephraim.

"Therefore 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. "Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? "The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. "Do they provoke Me to anger?" says the LORD. "Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?" Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place--on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched."

Of course our first impression is, this was a very unpleasant message, yet this is "the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord." Let's begin our study with four observations:

THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THIS MESSAGE

True prophets of God were men who acted and spoke according to what the Lord said. We can simply observe that Jeremiah did what the Lord told him to do, and said what the Lord told him to say. Verse 1 says: "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord," and then it describes what the prophet did and said.

NOTICE WHERE HE WAS TO DO THIS

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!'"

As a matter of self-examination, I have to read this and inquire of myself, "WHAT MY REACTION MIGHT HAVE BEEN..."

"Lord, this is Berkley speaking ... I ah ... I would be glad to deliver your message, but I don't think it would be a good idea to stand 'in the gate of the Lord's house' to say these things .. There are a lot of quiet, secluded places to preach this stuff ..."

But you see the Lord wanted this preaching done WHERE THE PEOPLE WERE!! So the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord was to be shouted ... was to be proclaimed plainly right in the crowded gate of the temple.

And notice WHAT HE WAS TO SAY:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, "if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, "then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your

fathers forever and ever. "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit."

Here's Jeremiah, in the gate area of the temple, where the crowd of people would pass by and congregate. In this very public place he was to tell the people of their sin and guilt! He had to tell them - they were trusting in lying words that cannot profit. He had to call upon these people - to repent, to amend their ways ... the message was: **YOU ARE GUILTY ... REPENT OR ELSE.**

And, **THIS WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE THREAT OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT.**

In verses 15-17; in verse 20, also in verses 32-34 ... here's some of that:

"And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren--the whole posterity of Ephraim. "Therefore 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. "Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? "The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. "Do they provoke Me to anger?" says the LORD. "Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?" Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place--on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched."

What courage! What conviction and backbone, for Jeremiah to stand in the gate to the temple and preach this message of **REPENTANCE**, warning the people that they had provoked the Lord to anger.

That's the context; that's what Jeremiah chapter seven is about. Now there is part of this I want to get into in more detail ...

Jeremiah 7:9-10

"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?"

The Lord had Jeremiah bring up this question; and this was like an **INTERROGATION**; the "third degree" we might say. I think I can hear a tone of extreme surprise.

"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?"

Let's consider the specific charges: "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know..."

STEALING, of course, is forbidden; it was forbidden in the Mosaic Law; it is forbidden in the New Testament. The old law was clear, "Thou shalt not steal," in Exodus 20:15. The New Testament is just as

clear. Paul said, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather, let him labor," (Eph. 4:28). A thief is one who acquires the property of another without his consent and knowledge. Overt acts of hold-ups or mugging would be obvious examples of theft. More sophisticated instances might be more widespread: shoplifting, employee pilfering, dubious financial practices, looting, underhanded fraud in business practices. Theft is sin -- anywhere, and when committed by anyone. These people were guilty of theft; then they would come and stand before the Lord in His house. They would say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations!"

MURDER. It is God who bestows life on human beings; God gives life, so homicide amounts to the destruction of something God has given. In the Bible life is invested with sanctity and the one who intentionally terminates life usurps presumptuously a prerogative which belongs exclusively to the Creator. So it says, "Thou Shalt Not Kill!" (Ex. 20:13). These people were guilty of homicide yet they would come and stand before the Lord in His house. They would say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations!"

ADULTERY. Breaking faith with your spouse, and giving yourself to another in defiance of God is an act of selfishness for which there is no excuse. There are few things they will crush the spirit of children like the adultery and divorce of parents!! The New Testament condemns adultery in statements too clear to be debated ...

- Jesus said, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery," (Mark 10:11).
- Heb. 13:4 says -- "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

These people Jeremiah preached to where violating their marriage covenant, but - as we might say today - "They came on to church anyway, stood before God and claimed their purity!" "We are delivered to do all these abominations!"

SWEARING FALSELY (NIV, perjury). When they were called to testify, or asked to speak the truth, they would lie. They were willing to deceive; not bound by their conscience to speak the truth. Still -- they would come and stand before the Lord in His house with the boast, "We are delivered to do all these abominations!"

BURNING INCENSE TO BAAL, and walking after other gods. But as if these sins weren't enough -- to accentuate their guilt, there was this **ARROGANT ASSUMPTION OF SAFETY**; this boasting -- "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, --- "and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations?'"

Here are people willing to sin against God, live unselfishly and then, **CLAIM TO BE SAVED**. They come on to worship, like everything is all right. I'm calling this their **ARROGANT ASSUMPTION OF SAFETY**. Yet God knew they were unfit. In verse 11, the Lord says, "I have seen it....Behold, I, even I,

have seen it....says the Lord."

Likewise we are warned: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap..." (Gal. 6:7). So, here is Jeremiah, preaching to the people crowding into the temple: "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, "and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?"

Conclusions & Lessons

THEY WERE GETTING NO GOOD FROM THEIR WORSHIP.

Worship isn't just a matter of being at a certain place at a certain time. The essence of worship cannot be seen - in good music, or visual effects, or emotional displays and beautiful buildings. Worship begins with your attitude toward God. So if you don't want to obey God in your life; if you manifest irreverence toward Him in your behavior -- **YOU ARE UTTERLY UNFIT AND UNQUALIFIED TO WORSHIP HIM.**

Jesus goes even further. Jesus taught - in Matt. 5:22,23 - if you are estranged from your brother, Jesus said, "First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift..."

I don't know why people come to worship when they don't respect God the rest of the time? What is their motive? Are they using worship as a cloke to cover up their real character? Are they fulfilling the demands of fashion, or upholding some sort of reputation or image they want to have? Are they attempting, in some small way, to quiet their conscience. Are they trying to buy divine favor?? I don't know why people come to worship, when they don't respect God the rest of the time?

Worship begins with your attitude toward God; worship is the heart's way of expressing the reverence we have for God all the time. So these impenitent sinners were getting no good from their worship. And ...

THEY WERE DECEIVING THEMSELVES.

Verse 4 says they were trusting in lying words. When men are very observant of religious ordinances and public worship and yet are guilty of the grossest, wickedness ... **THEY ARE DECEIVING THEMSELVES.** They are pretending to be (in their public life) what they are not (in their hearts, character and daily behavior). It is self-deception, and compounds the problem of sin and misbehavior.

THEY WERE INSULTING GOD.

Listen again: "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? 'Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,' says the LORD." By being guilty of all these sins, and then acting like they were fit to come to the temple and worship God ... they were insulting God. Likewise we are guilty, when we engage in sin without remorse and act like we enjoy fellowship with God.

THEY WERE PUTTING A STUMBLING BLOCK BEFORE OTHERS.

They were not only guilty of their own sin; through influence and example - they were dragging down the innocent. The sin of these hypocrites was soon to overwhelm Jerusalem in utter ruin. They became a stumbling block to their brethren, and brought about the ruin of the city.

Conclusion:

As I write this I know there is a tendency of thought here, where we are tempted to say: "... I don't steal ... I've never even contemplated a murder ... adultery isn't in my past or present .. I have no plans to swear falsely, burn incense to Baal or walk after other gods" How does this relate to me??

I think this relates to us in at least three ways: ONE, the moral courage and faith of Jeremiah becomes a model for us. TWO, the wickedness these people were guilty of was not something they suddenly decided to do ... through a gradual and subtle process of decay, they reached this depth of sin. THREE, we must know that worship begins with your attitude toward God; worship is the heart's way of expressing the reverence we have for God all the time.

This was the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah; and these things were written for our learning. The good news is - whatever you have done, you can be cleansed of sin because of Jesus' death ... that cleansing happens, when faith prompts you to obey Him. E-mail the editors of Expository Files if we can help in your journey away from sin.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 5.2; February 1998

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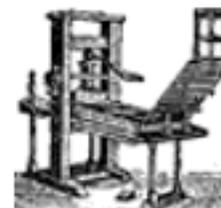


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Is There No Balm in Gilead?

Jeremiah 8:22

Jeremiah asked this famous rhetorical question Jer. 8:22. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?" The dire conditions of the people that caused them to need balm was given in the verse previous. "For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me." Jeremiah was dismayed, and maybe even disgusted, that the condition of the people have gotten so bad.

Balm, of course, is a medicinal salve. The people were wounded from their sins and idolatries and needed to be resorted. This brokenness is compared to physical maladies and physical cures to illustrate how unnecessarily tragic it was. People had sought the balm of Gilead to help their illnesses for centuries. In fact, the caravan that Joseph was sold to was heading to Egypt carrying balm from Gilead. (Gen. 37:25) A few years later when Joseph sent his brothers back for their remaining brother Benjamin (before he had revealed himself to them) their father Jacob said to take the best products of the land "to carry down to the man as a present, a little balm." (Gen. 43:11)

After the captivity, when Israel took the promised land, Gilead, on the west side of the Jordan, became part of their land. The tribe of Gad settled there. The balm trade then became as Israeli one. (Ezk. 27:17) The reason for all this was that one of the trees there secreted a turpentine like resin that was highly sought after. It is said the this balm was worth twice its weight in silver.

So Jeremiah's question is, "How can a people who traded in balm be so sick?" Of course its even worse than that - this is the physical illustration of a spiritual point. The real question behind the illustration is, "How can the people of God, with the Law in their midst, be so sinful?!"

What was the solution for the Jews? It was simply use the balm that they already had. And later, Jeremiah would use the same figure to express what the Egyptians needed to do: "Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured." (Jer. 46:11) So the solution for Jews and Gentiles alike is to go to Gilead and get balm. The heathens and Jews could be healed only in seeking help where it could truly be found -- in God.

Today, as Christians, we read of such troubles and are tempted to say, "My, I'm glad we've learned our lessons better than that now, we've gone to the Lord for help and have received it." True, to become Christians we must have done this, but we must continue in doing it as well. Consider the state of the church in Laodicea. "you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you

do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see." (Rev. 3:17,18) Notice especially the part about them being "blind" and needing to get "eye salve" from the Lord. In great parallel to ancient Israel and the balm of Gilead, Laodicea was only 13 miles away from a school famous for its medical knowledge, particularly its eyesalve.

So we see various figures used, but the problem's the same - people steeped in sin though the cure is so near. Are we in need of balm? Are we blind? Or is there another figure that might be better used to describe us -- Jesus also used the figure of thinking you're rich although really you're poor. What figure would be used to describe your life?

Seek the balm, the eyesalve, the clothing, the wealth, etc. that you really need.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 7.6; June 2000

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When The End Comes

Jeremiah 14:11-16

Someone once said, "All good things must come to an end." That is true, but the fact is, all things must come to an end on this earth — good or bad. As far as mankind, it has been revealed in God's word, "it is appointed for men to die once" (Heb. 9:27). And for the creation itself, God's word tells us, "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10). Nothing on this earth will survive in its current state, for even our lowly body will be transformed on the day of Christ's return. As Paul said: "the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52).

But some now deny the reality of an end such as God's word describes! Some deny there will ever be an end — of any kind! Some who begin with a denial of God suppose that this world on which we live and the universe in which it exists will continue forever or, at worst, continually degrade for billions and billions of years until some supernova or other catastrophic universal event will change things. To many, though, no thought is given to their end or, if any consideration of the end is given at all, it is short and shallow and pushed aside for the consideration of the 'here and now' more often than not. Most people would rather think about only today and not think about their future and what is to inevitably come. It's as if the vast majority thinks, "If I don't talk about it, it isn't real." But denying reality does not change reality! Try denying the reality of gravity and then jump off of a 10-story building; you might deny it for about 95 feet, but you will come face to face with reality soon afterwards.

Instead of denying reality [the eventual end of all things], let's consider Jeremiah 14:11-16 and how it describes a time when God's people denied reality up until the very end, and let us learn the lessons they did not learn — and for which they paid dearly. And let's boil it down to one, simple question: When the end comes, will you be prepared? We need to know some things right now — before that day comes, because when the end comes:

It Will Be Too Late. (vv. 11, 12) In the context, Israel was the one being chastised by God, even as they neared the punishment He had promised [captivity]. Though God had warned them time and time again, the people continued in their evil ways and followed after the gods of the surrounding nations. Sadly, because they had rejected Him and His warnings so many times (cf. 2 Chron. 36:15, 16), it was too late for anyone to now intervene on their behalf. What a sad statement! To whom would they go now

that it was too late to seek God's help and favor — the surrounding nations? They would be of no help. The fact was, their end was sealed.

When this was written, it was too late for these people to do anything about their punishment; it was certain that they were going to captivity. Our eternal destination is not yet certain, so let us heed the words spoken by God to His people before that day: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isa. 55:6). They had had opportunities to seek the Lord before that day, but they passed by those opportunities; don't let that be us! Let us heed the words of the apostle Paul: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). When the end comes, it will be too late to seek God; NOW is the time!

God also said He would not hear their cry when they fasted (v. 12). The implication of the fasting was that the people now had penitent hearts. But, alas, God said it was too late! The lesson we must certainly learn from this is that the time of repentance is NOW, for when the end comes, it will be too late to suddenly feel sorry for having transgressed the will of God! Then, we will be judged for the deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10), not for the utter terror and remorse we will feel in our hearts as we then stand before the God we once denied. Right now is the time for repentance, for as the psalmist said, "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Psa. 34:18). Blessed is the one who now realizes his spiritual destitution and who mourns his pitiful condition (Matt. 5:3, 4). Then it will be too late to repent; NOW is the time!

God also said that He would not accept their offerings (v. 12). Now, think about that; here is something that God had commanded, yet now He said He would no longer accept it from them — especially at this point. These people had a long history of failing to offer the required sacrifices, offering the required sacrifices without any real meaning, and dishonoring God by what they did give. The audacity of the people was demonstrated in that they went so far as to offer their children as sacrifices to their idols and on the same day come to the house of God to give the pretense of worship and faithfulness (Ezek. 23:37-39). Is it any wonder God would refuse their sacrifices — especially now that it was done only as a last resort?

Surely we can see the lesson for us in this passage: worship Him NOW and worship Him as He has instructed us. Many today refuse to worship the Lord, or refuse to worship Him as He prescribed, but I am confident that all will willingly acknowledge Him as Lord when the end comes — but it will then be too late! Let us now acknowledge Him as Lord in humble submission by obeying His words; then — and only then — can we call Him our Savior (Heb. 5:9). Rejecting Christ as the means of our salvation is just as repulsive in the sight of God as those of old who offered sacrifices with wicked intent. Let us not forget the words of the writer of Hebrews, who warned of the terrifying surety of punishment for those who have "trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). The sacrifice we must offer is self (Rom. 12:1) and it must be done NOW! When the end comes, it will be too late to try to offer something to God in service and worship. NOW is the time!

Some Deny The Reality of the End. (vv. 13, 14) All the time God's real prophets warned of the pending end and concurrent punishment, the people of God protested, the prophets denied it, and the

priests disparaged any idea that God would actually punish them. But, again, denial is not reality! The psalmist tells us, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psa. 14:1), but does his denial mean God really doesn’t exist? Of course not! To the fool, God does not exist simply because he says so, and that is why he is a fool! The fact is, those who deny God's existence do so because they do not want to accept the consequences: a necessary implication that obedience to His will is expected! On the day, when all stand before the judgment throne, none will then deny Him, but then it will be too late! Though God did not leave Himself without witness (Acts 14:17), some will deny He exists, and certainly deny any claim He makes to have all authority over us. Many men will deny the obvious, proclaiming themselves wise [“Are you dumb enough to believe in God?”] and beyond such “simple-mindedness,” yet His attributes are clearly seen! The problem is not in the clarity, but in the willingness to see! Again, the root cause of this denial is that they might do what they want to do and have a clear conscience to engage in what are truly called Godless acts.

Some deny the fact of the end because they ultimately seek to deny what comes with the end: judgment. God's own people were not immune from the false idea that God would not punish, but fell prey to the deceptive words of false prophets, who told them, “Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us” (Mic. 3:11). They had gotten so used to the longsuffering and mercy of God that they came to believe, “The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil” (Zeph. 1:12). But to those false prophets who said, “It is not He. Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine,” God promised, “Thus shall it be done to them” (Jer. 5:12, 13). When the end came for them, those denials must have seemed very foolish!

Today, I must sadly report that some of our own brethren are working hard at denying the reality of an end that includes punishment. It was not so long ago that we rightly chastised and ridiculed those who taught the idea of the so-called “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” in saying God would not punish the wicked for an eternity. But now we have men such as Ed Fudge, the late Homer Hailey, and F. LaGard Smith proclaiming this doctrine! [I will gladly furnish quotes from their writings to those who ask.] Oh, how far we have fallen! It seems we now have men who have followed the path of the false prophets and worthless priests of Israel’s day, proclaiming, “Peace! Peace!” When there is no peace. Friends and brethren, do not be fooled; when our Lord spoke of the coming punishment of the wicked (Matt. 25:46; John 5:28, 29), He was not deceived or mistaken!

In The End, God’s Word Proven True. (vv. 15, 16) In the context of this rebuke, God plainly tells us that the false prophets who said, “‘Sword and famine shall not be in this land’ — ‘By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed!’” What they had spoken was “a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart” (v. 14), and for that they would be punished! Though the people, the priests, and the prophets all denied the coming end, it came — just as God said it would! Like all the times before when warnings were given and punishment was promised, God’s word was proven true by its fulfillment.

The apostle Peter warned against the false prophets who would come (2 Pet. 2:1-3; 4-10), and “exploit you with deceptive words” (v. 2) and who would “bring on themselves swift destruction” (v. 1). Peter comforted the minds of the faithful in reminding them that God had not in times past overlooked the evil deeds of men and even angels, and with that confidence, reminded the faithful that the Lord knew how

to “reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (v. 9). Just as with the false prophets of old, God will punish the deceivers for their deception! Though they deny it, their punishment will come and theirs is most certain! Whenever we hear men today proclaiming the love of God would not allow a man to suffer punishment [and certainly not an eternal punishment], you can be sure that he will likely be on the receiving end of the very thing he denies will come, just as the false prophets of old.

The sad part of this rebuke is that God had to deal not only with the deceivers, but also with the deceived (v. 16). It is sad because the deceived receive no less a rebuke for having believed [willingly] the deception of the false prophets! The false prophets spoke deception, but they merely spoke what the people wanted to hear! For their willingness to hear deceptive words, the deceived would also be punished! Let us heed this warning every so seriously, for there are many deceivers gone out into the world who proclaim to be speakers of truth. Do not let us think that we are beyond the same fate, for if deceivers exist, there will be those who are deceived. Don't let it be us! The very possibility is found in the words of the apostle Paul, who warned, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit” and, “Let no one cheat you of your reward” (Col. 2:8, 18). If we are ignorant of truth, how can we know whether or not we are being deceived? It will be a sad day when we stand before God, having been led astray but believing we followed truth!

This sad occasion in the history of God's people is given for us an admonition to follow after the true path of righteousness and not be led away by the deceivers who promise peace and comfort when, in reality, we face the wrath of God. When we have men preaching salvation by mere confession of Jesus as the Christ, we are in danger of this certain punishment, for that is not the whole counsel of God! Yes, we must confess Jesus as the Christ, but we must also repent of our sins and turn to God (Acts 26:20). We must also be baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins and live faithfully until our last day (Acts 2:38; Heb. 10:34-39). What have you done? Will you be ready when the end comes?

By Steven C. Harper
From Expository Files 12.10; October 2005

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Unpopularity of the Lord's Servant

Jeremiah 15:15-20

You are not going to get a medal for being a faithful disciple; at least not in this lifetime. There will be no parades honoring you for spiritual or moral courage. There is no blue ribbon offered for struggling with and overcoming temptation. There is no lifetime achievement award for faithful discipleship. You will not receive a platinum plaque inscribed with the account of how you faced your persecutors alone and prevailed. Of course, there will one day be an award ceremony. It will be celestial in nature; and its glory will far outshine anything here. But on that day, the victors will be giving credit to another for their victory. Jesus deserves my medal, my crown, my trophy. The world seems quite willing to heap prizes on those it has determined to be great. Some of the feats it awards are indeed noteworthy; Scientific advances in medicine or technology; athletic achievement and/or acts of bravery. But then, it also awards not so noble achievements. The winners of MTV music awards are some of the most ungodly men and women who have ever walked the face of the planet. The same could be said for some of the winners of the Oscar. And at the same time the world is awarding such wickedness, it mocks those who seek to live by faith. Its very frustrating to see the toll such attitudes takes upon society at large, but it is society's fault. To see society heap its accolades on those who have lost all remnants of human decency and nobility is terribly sad.

But the problem is not a new one. It was during the years of 625-575 B.C. that the prophet Jeremiah did his work. It was a very discouraging time to be a man of God. The nation of Judah looked at people of faith in much the same way as our own society. They weren't giving away medals for faith during Jeremiah's time either! At one point in his career, this great prophet expressed some feelings that people of faith usually try to squelch when they arise. Let's notice Jeremiah's prayer (which is more of a complaint than anything else) as well as God's answer. Hopefully, both will help us to see our own similar circumstances a little more clearly (Jeremiah 15:15-20).

THE NEED FOR GOD

"Thou who knowest, O LORD, remember me, take notice of me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of Thy patience, take me away; know that for Thy sake I endure reproach." (Jeremiah 15:15). Jeremiah knows that God is aware of the circumstances which he faces. God was aware of the moral and spiritual collapse of Judean society, and He is aware of the same in our

own society today.

Additionally, Jeremiah asks that the Lord intervene. The ideas of "remember" and "take notice" involve more than mere mental awareness. Jeremiah is asking that God take action, first by taking vengeance on those that are persecuting him.

We may wonder how that fits with the spirit of Christianity. Suffice it to say that it puts vengeance where it ought to be; in the Lord's hands. Also, the concept of asking for such is not foreign to the New Testament (Revelation 6:10). Righteous indignation against the wicked is certainly permissible for the Christian, though such anger must not cause us to lose control.

THE LOST JOY

"Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O LORD, GOD of hosts." (Jeremiah 15:16). Jeremiah thinks back to the beginning of his walk with God. He had "eaten" the word of God; that is, he made them a part of himself. He remembers how that he was so happy and confident. But now much of that joy seems to have vanished amid the troubles he was facing.

Again, many have reached similar points in our lives today. Due to tumults of life, our joy as God's children is diminished and sometimes forgotten. Our happiness that we are children of God gives way to distress. We may long to have that confidence once again. We must not think that we are alone on that road. Jeremiah walked it six centuries before Christ came.

SEPARATION FROM THE WICKED

"I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers, nor did I exult. Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone, for Thou didst fill me with indignation." (Jeremiah 15:17). Much of Jeremiah's work had to do with pointing out the peoples' error and calling them to repentance. It had to do with announcing the grave consequences of their continuing apostasy. It should not be surprising then that Jeremiah was not invited to many parties. Faithful people of God who live during such times simply are not going to be popular people. Obviously, Jeremiah did not enjoy "sitting alone." Here he simply is voicing his discouragement. It is the same thing that you have probably endured at one time or another. One of the things this tells us is that this text is written by a real person with real feelings, just like us.

A PERPLEXING DILEMMA

"Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Wilt Thou indeed be to me like a deceptive stream with water that is unreliable?" (Jeremiah 15:18). Jeremiah goes further here than I would be comfortable in going in a prayer to God. Maybe it is because I have never been tested as sorely as Jeremiah.

He asks when his pain will cease and his wound heal. He is not talking about physical pain and wounds here, but emotional and spiritual. Here we have a hurting man.

He also asks if God will turn out to be a deceptive stream to him, promising refreshment but in the end offering no drinkable water. He has told others that God is a well of water for the thirsty. But now doubts have entered his own heart and need to be dealt with.

GOD'S ASSURANCE

"Therefore, thus says the LORD, 'If you return, then I will restore you - Before Me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They for their part may return to you, but as for you, you shall not go to them. Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you; for I am with you to save you and deliver you...' (Jeremiah 15:19-20). In the Lord's answer to Jeremiah, the first thing He invites Jeremiah to do is to "return." Jeremiah must first pick his armor back up to be restored. God will not do it for Jeremiah. He will not force Jeremiah back into his work. It must be Jeremiah's choice. A part of this must entail "extracting the precious from the worthless." There had been conflicting thoughts clouding up Jeremiah's mind. Things of faith must be separated from thoughts of doubt, and the doubts then be discarded. That, too, is up to Jeremiah.

Also, Jeremiah must resolve not to compromise truth with others in order to become acceptable to them. The Lord says its fine for them to "return to you, but you shall not go to them." The truth of God must not be compromised... ever.

If Jeremiah will return; if he will extract the precious from the worthless; if he will not compromise away the truth, then God promises that He will make Jeremiah strong, like a "bronze wall." He assures Jeremiah that he will ultimately prevail.

To bring the message home; the Lord has assured us of the same things. He promises to strengthen us in perilous times (Philippians 4:13; Hebrews 4:16). If we maintain our walk with the Lord, there is nothing that can defeat us; not tribulation; not distress; not persecution; not even death (Romans 8:35-39). I do not know, given the nature of the times in which we now live, of a more important message than this for those who are the people of God.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 2.2; February, 1995

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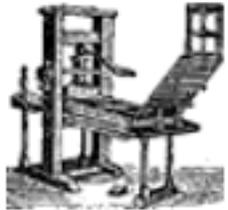
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Thus Says The Lord: Stand and Speak

Jeremiah 26

In the twenty-third year of Jeremiah's beleaguered ministry as a prophet, God told him to speak once again to the nation. "Rooting out" and "pulling down" characterized the prophet's message from the beginning (Jer. 1:10). This message was to be no different. The nation had refused to heed the warnings and the day of destruction drew near.

"Thus says the Lord: 'Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them, Do not diminish a word (Jer. 26:2)."

The pristine and holy glory that characterized the temple in Solomon's day had dimmed to the point of going out. Here for a brief moment the truth of God's word spoken by a humble servant eclipsed the dark deeds practiced within its walls. The prophet's work was difficult but simple; stand and speak. Difficult because, as Jeremiah had been promised by God twenty-three years earlier, there would be opposition to his message. Simple in that God would give him the words to speak. The simple message was,

"If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law...I will make this city a curse (Jer. 26:4-6).

Jeremiah had not entered his life's work without great reluctance. "Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth" (Jer. 1:6), he offered when called by God. God assured him by making this pledge, "Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you" (Jer. 1:8). Now after many years of devotion and faithfulness Jeremiah once again stood before those hard faces and foreheads of stone. His task as a prophet of God was to stand and speak. The truth never finds its true expression in the corners or recesses in small whispered voices. Falsehood is arrogant and bold and so those who have the truth must stand and speak.

God made it clear to Jeremiah what He wanted spoken. "All the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word." The truth becomes weak and ineffective when whittled down by man. No trees are felled by the woodsmen wielding a chainsaw minus the chain. The sappy, toothless message containing partial truths may please and console the hearers but has no power to change their hearts.

A heavy mantle of responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of the one who proclaims truth, what

about the listener? The Lord told Jeremiah, "Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings" (Jer. 26:3)

"Perhaps" is a word expressing hope and possibility. God does not force one to heed His word. He waits in anticipation. "Maybe, perhaps they will listen to Me this time." Although the nation as a whole rejected the word of God there were still some pliable hearts encouraged by the message of Jeremiah. The message so clearly and boldly proclaimed must have penetrated the hearts of some, perhaps even Daniel and his three friends who would very shortly be snatched from their homeland never to return.

Inspired by the word of God and the example of this courageous and faithful servant, these and others would be able to maintain their faith during the trials of captivity.

God intensifies his optimism saying, "Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil ways." Repeated proclamation of the truth without apparent results often produces discouragement, resentment and even bitterness of heart. It disappointed God that His people did not listen and turn. Jesus centuries later wept for the people as He viewed the city of Jerusalem crying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Mat. 23:37). But optimism kept alive is the boon of the proclaimer of truth. We cannot taint our message with pessimism, heartfelt disappointment out of love, yes, but not pessimism. After all, it is "good news" that brings promise of good results.

"And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: 'If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to heed the words of My servants and prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded), then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth'''" (Jer. 26:4-6)

The responsibility of Jeremiah was to stand and speak, the people's was to listen. If they heeded the word God would relent, if not He would make their city a curse. Time was running out for Judah. In less than two years Nebuchadnezzar would enter the gates of the city and seize control of their nation. In the prophecy of Ezekiel it is made abundantly clear that God finds no pleasure in condemning the wicked. Rather he says, "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? for I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live" (Ezek. 18:30-32)!

In a similar message spoken by Jeremiah, God said, "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel" (Jer. 7:12). The reference to making "this house like Shiloh" goes back to another dark time in the history of God's people. He called upon them to remember the misplaced trust that an earlier generation had put in the ark of the covenant. In those days the sons of Eli made the Lord's people transgress (1 Sam. 2:24). Threatened by hordes of uncircumcised Philistines the sinful children of Israel summoned the ark of the covenant to the field of battle thinking that it would insure their victory. It was

a sad day, Israel was defeated and the ark of God was captured. Not unlike the people in Eli's day, Jeremiah's listeners were guilty of listening to the lying words, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord..." (Jer. 7:4), believing that a city containing the temple of God would surely be spared from the invasion of a foreign nation. However, God would not relent if they refused to turn from their evil ways.

When the priests, the prophets and the people heard Jeremiah's message they seized him saying, "You will surely die!" (Jer. 26:8). When the princes of Judah heard these things they came and heard Jeremiah's message (Jer. 26:10, 11). Their reaction was quite different. There were still some honest hearts in Jerusalem. They said, "This man does not deserve to die. For he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God" (Jer. 26:16).

In arguing the case for Jeremiah the princes of Judah appealed to the case of Micah, the prophet, and king Hezekiah. Micah called upon God's people to repent. Hezekiah did not kill Micah but listened to him and God relented concerning their doom (Jer. 26:19). Those who thought Jeremiah should be put to death, for his supposed blasphemy against the temple of God, brought up the case of the prophet Urijah. Urijah prophesied against the city and the land as had Jeremiah. Jehoikim hunted-down the prophet who had fled to Egypt and put him to death (Jer. 26:20-23). Those who believed Jeremiah was not worthy of death prevailed and he was spared (Jer. 26:24).

Reactions to the truth vary as widely today. Some will listen to those who stand and speak the truth and they will put away their evil ways. Others hardened by the deceitfulness of sin will be stiff-necked and call for the ouster of the messenger. Our responsibility is clear. If we are speaking the truth we must do so boldly, unafraid, and refusing to diminish God's word. If we are listening to the truth we must examine ourselves and turn from our evil ways. Christianity is not for the faint of heart.

May God grant us the courage to seize the prize.

By Karl Hennecke
From Expository Files 4.5; May 1997

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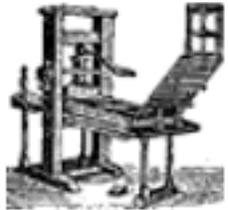
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Far From Home

Jeremiah 29:1-14

The people of Judah had fallen from grace. They had rebelled against the principles upon which their nation had been founded. Judah had turned its back upon God and rejected any attempt by those sent to her to call her back. As promised, God withdrew His protection from her. He had warned that if His people became faithless that He would employ a pagan power to conquer them and lead them back into captivity. He had led them from Egyptian bondage 800 years before, and now, because of their infidelity, He would allow them to return to bondage; this time in Babylon.

They had refused to believe it could ever happen to them. They found their own false prophets to tell them that everything was fine. They ridiculed Jeremiah and others who warned of the devastation to come. They were proud and arrogant. The Lord spoke through Jeremiah and put it this way; "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north...and I will send Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon... against this land and against its inhabitants...and this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (JEREMIAH 25:9-11).

Indeed, history shows us that the words of Jeremiah turned into fact as they were fulfilled down to the last detail. The desolation began with the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 606 A.D. and the first deportation of the best of the land into slavery on foreign soil. In this number was Daniel who later would also be a prophet while a servant of Nebuchadnezzar. Further deportations followed and finally Jerusalem was destroyed, just as the prophets had warned. It was seventy years in exile before the now repentant people of God were permitted to go back home and begin to rebuild their wrecked cities. It was Darius, king of the Persians, who allowed the rebuilding to begin by a remnant of what was left of Judah and Israel in 536 B.C.

Believers in God and the Bible are not surprised to find such prophetic accuracy in the pages of the Scripture. It is exciting for us to investigate such fulfillments as it deepens our respect for our God's power and wisdom. After Jeremiah's prophecy began to be fulfilled by the first deportation into slavery, Jeremiah wrote a letter to those serving in Babylon. These were sad people who had lost everything; their homes, freedom and in many cases were separated from their families. They were brought to live in a strange land with strange customs and language. Jeremiah's instructions to these exiles seem pertinent to God's people today as we are also exiles in a manner of speaking.

GOD'S ADVICE TO THE EXILE

"Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to...all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." (JEREMIAH 29:1). The Christian today is also an exile. The New Testament tells us that men and women of faith have always looked at this world as only a temporary home. We are invited to approach life with the same attitude as Abraham who "died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has prepared a city for them." (HEBREWS 11:13-16).

This world is only temporary. Our stay here is very short, relatively speaking. It makes little sense to live with every focus on the things of this world when the time we spend here is so fleeting compared to the vastness of eternity. " And if you address the Father as the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon the earth...Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul." (I PETER 1:17; 2:11).

ACCEPTING LIFE AS IT COMES

"Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens, and eat their produce...take wives and become fathers of sons and daughters...seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you unto exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf..." (JEREMIAH 29:4-7). Life goes on. Sometimes we are called upon to face tremendous difficulties as a result of our choosing to follow Jesus. In history, some have decided that the only way one can be successful is to go off somewhere and live in a monastery. This has never been God's answer concerning how to live our lives here. Jeremiah told the exiles of his day to live as normal lives as possible. He also told them to pray for the welfare of the city which had taken them captive, much in the same way as Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies as well as for our government. The New Testament tells us to let our lives be examples to others; "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." (I PETER 2:12).

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

"For thus saith the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'" (JEREMIAH 29:10). God had the timing all worked out. I am sure that seventy years seemed like a long time for the people, but seventy years is what had been decreed. There would be no short cuts. God knew how long and how much. He also knows how long our exile here will last. The Son of God will one day appear in the clouds to take the exiles home; "...because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (ACTS 17:31). We are encouraged to be patient and wait for that day; to never give up because the day of our homecoming has already been decided.

TRUST GOD IN EVERYTHING

"For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you...and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile." (JEREMIAH 29:11-14). Through all of life's hardships there is one absolutely secure place wherein we can place our hope and future. God assured the exiles of Jeremiah's day that He loved them. Even in their bleakest hour God was there and influencing events toward their proper conclusion. He is still there today. His plans for our future fill us with hope; "...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." (I PETER 1:8,9).

BEWARE OF FALSE HOPES

"For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them..." (JEREMIAH 29:8,9). It was something people really wanted to believe. The false prophets were telling them that they would be going home soon; it would not take seventy years. They were insisting that captivity would soon be over and there were probably many ears happy to hear the news. But it wasn't true! Today we have the modern counterparts of these false prophets. Some promise to make you well if you send them money. Some say they know when Jesus will come when the Bible says no one knows. Some say God does not exist and that there will never be a judgment and so you can live however you want to without regret. Some say human beings are simply uppity apes. Some say grab the gusto. Some say if you do not get your life right this time, you will come back again reincarnated as another person. Do not allow yourself to be made to trust in a lie. The truth of God is better than the lies of men.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 1.6; June, 1994

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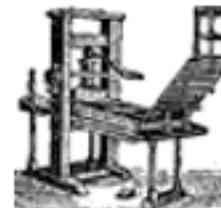


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Old and New (1st and 2nd) Covenants

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah 31:31-34 - *"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that 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 bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah.*

This announcement marks a pivotal point in the history of God and his relation to his people. It is his promise of a new covenant, different from, and much improved, from the covenant made at Mount Sinai. This is the first biblical reference to a new covenant. The passage is quoted in the New Testament, Heb. 8:8-12. No amount of theological manipulation can make the "new" the same as the "old." The simple words, "not according to" forever separate the two.

From Mount Sinai came God's first covenant with Israel. That covenant was made to one nation, Israel. It did not exist prior to Sinai, except in God's purpose. Other covenants had been made, but this one marked a definite change in covenants. It was God's first written covenant, revealed in the form of the first written system of laws and statutes.

The word covenant in the Hebrew language is "Berith." The corresponding Greek word is "diatheke." The Greek term "suntheke" is a word for a covenant between two equals. It is not a New Testament word. "Diatheke" is the term the New Testament employs to translate either covenant or testament. The reason is obvious; God made no covenant with man as man's equal.

The N.T. book of Hebrews presents "diatheke" as a last will and testament (Heb. 9:15-17). Whereas "suntheke" always means an agreement made on equal terms which either party can change. The terms of a "suntheke" covenant can be negotiated. Not so with "diatheke." W.E. Vine noted the difference saying "diatheke" "primarily signifies 'a disposition of property by will or otherwise.' In its use in the Septuagint, it is the rendering of a Hebrew word meaning a 'covenant' or agreement (from a verb signifying 'to cut or divide,' . . . In contradistinction to the English word 'covenant' (literally, 'a coming together'), which signifies a mutual undertaking between two parties or more, each

binding himself to fulfill obligations, it does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person." (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.)

Ephesians 2:12 describes the former condition of Gentile Christians as "strangers from the covenants of promise." The fact that Paul put covenants in the plural accords with the number of promissory covenants God made with various people at different times.

1. He made a covenant with Noah to never again destroy the earth with a flood -- a promissory covenant (Gen. 9:9-12).
2. The promise in Gen. 3:15 was a covenantal promise of God which he renewed from time to time -- a promissory covenant (see 2 Sam. 7:12, 22).
3. The covenant God made with Abraham was a promise to bless all nations through the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:10-11).

All these are "covenants of promise." God alone makes these covenants. The Bible makes a distinction between covenants of promise and covenants of law. The children of Ephraim refused to keep God's covenant by refusing to walk in his law (Psa. 78:9-10).

Laws don't structure the covenant; the particular covenant contains laws and conditions that must be obeyed and complied with in order to keep the covenant. Covenant breakers are those who refuse to obey covenantal law.

This is true of the covenant God made at Sinai and with the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31. Verse 33 clearly states this: "This shall be (future) my covenant . . . I will put my law in their inward part . . ."

Jeremiah prophesied of God's covenant, God's law. God said he would make the covenant. Man had nothing to do with "making" the covenant. Man has only to accept and enjoy its benefits or reject it and suffer consequences. God said of the covenant, it is MY covenant and said HE would make it.

God also said "it shall be my law for my people." The covenant God promised was his law he promised would come in the future, in "the latter days." It is by God's love and grace he was willing to make a covenant with his people.

Verse 3 of this chapter: "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Here he promised his people a new beginning "in the latter days" (Jer. 30:24). His promise of a new covenant was intended to give them assurance of a wonderful future state.

Just as the prophecies of Isaiah (2:1-4), Micah (4:1), and Joel (2:28) promised a bright future, so the prophecy of this new covenant enhanced the hope of Jeremiah and the people of God. The prophetic

future of all men rested on God making a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This refers to the new age ushered in when Jesus, by his own blood, sealed forever the New Testament (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:19-23).

In the same act of grace, he nailed the old to his cross (Col. 2:14) thus breaking down the middle wall of partition and establishing a domain of spiritual rest and peace (Eph. 2:14-16).

Not only does God say the covenant is his to make, he also says it is ours to keep. Keeping the covenant means complying with the laws of that covenant. The old covenant, made exclusively with the Jews at Sinai, was broken. That covenant is described by inspiration as "weak through the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) and faulty (Heb. 8:7). Because fault was found with the first covenant (made at Sinai) a second was sought for and established. Hebrews 8:7-12 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31ff. There can be no possible way to scripturally say God has never had but one covenant with his people.

Under the provisions of the first covenant, the fault was not the covenant, established by God, but in the lack of provision it held for full and instant remission of sins (Heb. 10:1-4). The law, the old covenant, made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did (Heb. 7:19). Notice the interchange in the words "commandment going before" and the old covenant ("diatheke") that was done away in Christ (2 Cor. 3:14). The new covenant is "a better hope," "a better covenant," being based on better promises (Heb. 8:6).

Everything taught in the Bible about covenants is against the idea that there is one, and only one, covenant God has anything to do with and that all other covenants are but "subsets" of that alleged one covenant.

No amount of theological manipulation can make the "new" the same as the "old," and the "first" the same as the "second." The simple words, "not according to" forever separate the two.

To say one thing is "not according to" another thing is to say they are not the same but different. God's statement that the new covenant is "not according to" the one he made at Sinai with those Jews who escaped Egyptian slavery has reference to two covenants, one old and done away, the other new and in effect till the end of time.

By Dudley Ross Spears
From Expository Files 14.7; July 2007

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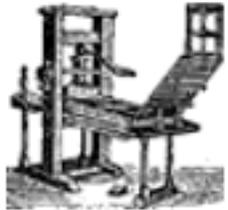
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

King Jehoiakim's Bible (Jeremiah 36)

Prior to the Babylonian captivity, the nation of Judah had become exceedingly wicked. They were immoral, dishonest in their dealings with one another, and idolaters. God sent many prophets to turn His people back to Him. They would call upon the people to revere God again as their ancestors had done, at least during their better moments. They were told that God would continue to bless them if they would turn to God.

Like some of the others, Jeremiah prophesied that doom and destruction were coming to Jerusalem and Judah through the Babylonian Empire. The only way the destruction could be averted was by repentance. History records that the people of Judah did not repent, and their attitude, as a whole, can be summed up by the attitude of the king, Jehoiakim.

We'll consider the king more in a moment, but first consider this: Why would the people not repent? It seemed the logical thing to do. They could not come out ahead by rebelling against God. Perhaps for the same reasons that many people today do not turn to God. There might be a lack of respect, or love, or trust. Or there may be pride or other self interests. But with regard to King Jehoiakim and the people of Judah, consider Jeremiah chapter 36.

Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to write the prophecies of doom against Judah (Jeremiah 36:1-2). God's purpose for the writing was not to anger them, but to save them (see vs. 3). Though the words of the prophecy might be deemed rather harsh, understand that God is not happy in speaking to them in terms of warning. He would much prefer faith on the part of the people. He always wants us to do well.

Baruch, a servant of Jeremiah, is enlisted to write the words down as Jeremiah dictates them by the Spirit. (Jeremiah 36:4,18). Archeologists have discovered in diggings around Jerusalem some of Baruch's signet rings which he would use to seal the documents which he wrote, identifying them as genuine. He and Jeremiah are real historical figures. After Baruch wrote the words, he was commanded by Jeremiah to go and read the prophecy in the temple. (Jeremiah. 36:5-6). The message found its way to king Jehoiakim as Jeremiah and Baruch are forced into hiding. The king, after hearing a small part of the message, took a knife and cut up the scroll, finally casting it into the fire (Jeremiah 36:22-23). Not everyone who rejects God's word has such a flair for drama, but the end result is still the same. A few men tried to persuade the king to stop, but most were silent (Jeremiah 36:24-25).

The king then turned his attention to Baruch and Jeremiah, seeking to arrest them, but the Lord protected them. God instructed Jeremiah to write another roll with all the former words and with additional words of personal destruction to king Jehoiakim. Jeremiah did as he was instructed by the Lord (Jeremiah

36:28-31).

The New Testament also has messages of doom, and the purpose is the same - to turn people from their sins. (Acts 17:30,31; Hebrews 10:30,31) God is patient with us, but eventually His patience will end and destruction will come. (Romans 2:4,5; 2 Peter 3:9,10).

Sadly, the spirit of Jehoiakim is still alive and well today. When people reject plain Bible teaching, for all practical purposes, they are cutting and burning the Word of God. One might not go through the literal act of cutting and burning, but the rejection of God is just the same. Why would anyone think that they can alter the truth of God's word by ignoring it. One might as well take a knife to it. But in the old days of Judah, judgment came just as the word of God had said it would, and Jehoiakim's knife did nothing but cut paper. It did not and could not alter the truth. You and I cannot either.

Jehoiakim and his court had no fear of God as they read His word to them. That was too bad. It cost them dearly as individuals, and Judah as a nation. May we as individuals, and our nation as a whole, resolve to do better, and by the grace of God, be successful.

By Jon W. Quinn
Final Page
From Expository Files 11.3, March, 2004

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Burning the Scroll

Jeremiah 36:23

"The king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire" (Jeremiah 36:23)

It was Judah's last hour. Destruction was coming because of their wickedness and idolatry, and God had sent Jeremiah to give His people one last chance to repent. Finally, He tells Jeremiah to "Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations..."(Jer 36:2). Why did God try this last time? "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin"(v. 3). The scroll was one last chance for Judah.

Ultimately, the scroll gets to the king. It is read in his presence. Imagine a king hearing that his kingdom will be taken from him and his city destroyed. "And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the earth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the heart" (Jer 36:23). He burned God's word!

King Jehoiakim had an unwillingness to receive God's word. It stung too bad and said things he didn't want to hear. Maybe he thought if he destroyed the words, they wouldn't come true. Perhaps he trusted that he could politically maneuver a way by which he could avoid such a fate. Whatever his reasoning, it resulted in him refusing to hear God. The problem of being unwilling to hear God did not end with Jehoiakim. Even today, we can burn the scroll of God's word by flatly refusing to submit to God.

Many in denominational error feel no need to change, no matter what God says. "I'm happy where I am." "You believe your way, I'll believe mine." "My parents belonged to ___ denomination, so it's good enough for me." In such a state, what good does Bible teaching do? Can't we just burn our Bibles? Great men of God are willing to change when wrong! Apollos, when he was explained "the way of God more accurately"(Acts 18:26), was willing to change his teaching and life. Paul, when confronted by the Lord on the road to Damascus, was willing to change his life completely (Acts 9:4-6). Just because we believe something doesn't mean we're right! Just because we don't like the truth doesn't change it! Was ignorance bliss for King Jehoiakim? To refuse to change at God's bidding is like burning the scroll, hoping it will make the truth disappear.

Often we begin to think we know better than God. In discussions about the Bible, often scriptural arguments are countered with statements like "I just believe..." Who cares what we believe if it contradicts God's word? When Peter was asked, "What shall we do?", he answered, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:37-38). Yet many teachers today, when asked the same question, give a radically different answer than Peter! They say "Receive Jesus into your heart and say a sinner's prayer." Should inspired Peter's answer win or should our answer? Why would we think we know better than God how to be saved? God says "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Hear Jeremiah: "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). How about Solomon? "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov 14:12). God says He knows far, far better than us! Yet when we refuse to hear because we think we know better, we might as well burn the scroll!

Yet even if we understand we must change and humbly submit to God's law, we still must examine this principle closely. Don't we often refuse to face our sin because we like it? Perhaps our pleasure is to gossip, so we don't ever read passages that discuss talebearers and speaking evil. We get angry at the preacher who brings them up. When others mention it, we quickly change the subject. After all, gossip isn't the worst sin, is it? Sure, sin is bad, but this is my pet sin! Aren't we burning the scroll?

We also can shy away from difficult commands. Go to my sinning brother? (Gal 6:1, Matt 18:15-17) Forgive? (Eph 4:32) Visit the needy? (James 1:27, Matt 25:31-46) Those are hard! Surely someone else will just go see the sinning brother. Maybe that person will forget that mean thing I did. I'll go visit when I get some free time. Isn't making excuses not to do God's will the same as rejecting it outright? Wouldn't it be easier if we just cut those passages out of our Bibles and burned them?

In our reading of the Bible, we can often fall into the trap of reading to reinforce what we already believe rather than to find what God is saying. Every passage that tells of trouble and destruction is speaking to someone else! Only the comforting passages are for me! Perhaps we read to simply have more ammunition to defeat those in error. Is Bible knowledge as simple as finding passages that will win us arguments? "God...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Heb 1:1-2). Don't we want to hear what He has to say to us? Can we even be reading the Bible and still not be doing anything more than burning the scroll?

King Jehoiakim was punished for his insolence. We can learn from his mistake. Ignoring the truth won't make it go away. Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). We must be brutally honest in our handling of the word of God. We must humbly submit to Him in everything (Eph 5:24). We must confront our own flaws and problems, do our best to obey even God's difficult commands, and handle God's word properly (2 Tim 2:15). May we ever listen to God and never burn the scroll!

By Jacob Hudgins
From Expository Files 14.9; September 2007

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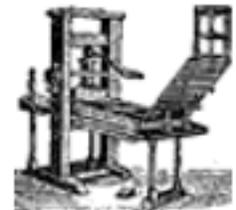
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Responding to Calamity

Jeremiah 44

Imagine yourself in the following set of circumstances: you were living in a good land that you have heard was given to your ancestors by your mighty God. You heard the stories of how God delivered your people from a terrible king, vanquished the land before your people, and constantly delivered and preserved your people. Nevertheless, in your own day a great empire came to your land, destroyed your cities and the temple of your God, and your people have either fled to neighboring countries or were exiled into the empire's homeland. In this circumstance, what would you think? How would you respond to this series of events?

This is precisely the situation that faced the exiles of Judah in and around the year 586 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple (2 Kings 25, Jeremiah 39; 52). The people of Judah for years trusted that God would never allow the heathen Babylonians to violate His Temple or profane His land (cf. Jeremiah 7:4). Nevertheless, these very things happened. How did the people of Judah respond?

Jeremiah 44 records for us two examples of responses to the events that occurred. While the context demonstrates that Jeremiah is speaking with some of the exiles who traveled to Egypt, we can be sure that the same issue is under discussion for those in Babylon and other places.

God expected a certain response from the people. He makes it extremely clear why all of these calamities came upon Judah and Jerusalem: the people did not listen to Him through His prophets, continued to worship other gods, and therefore incurred God's wrath (Jeremiah 44:1-6). Nevertheless, the exiles in Egypt continue to worship other gods, and God demands that they stop this, lest they also be destroyed (Jeremiah 44:7-15). The people, however, responded as follows in Jeremiah 44:16-19:

"As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off burning incense to the queen of heaven, and pouring out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the

sword and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink-offerings unto her, without our husbands?"

The people of Judah exiled in Egypt did not respond to the calamity according to God's desire; remaining in their darkened minds, they rather ascribed the calamity to the end of worshipping the Queen of Heaven and not because the people forsook the LORD. One can understand some of the "logic" involved; after all, it was only in the time of Hezekiah, who returned to worshipping the LORD only, that the Assyrians attacked (2 Kings 18-20), and the time of Josiah, the next such reformer, saw the beginning of the end of Judah (2 Kings 22-25). After all, these same Israelites are the ones who constantly rejected the message of Jeremiah in the land (cf. Jeremiah 26:10-12, etc.); should we be surprised when they continue to not listen?

The Scriptures and history, however, are the final judges of these people: all such Jews who worshipped other gods were killed or simply become a part of the populations around them and are lost to history (Jeremiah 44:20-30). Other Jews, more repentant and humbled, did indeed return to the land of Israel in the time of Cyrus the Persian and afterward (cf. Ezra 1-2). Despite all of the idolatry in the land before the Exile, the historical and Biblical evidence is clear that no such idolatry continued when the people returned to the land.

As we can see, many of the Jews would not be humbled in the sight of the LORD but instead found justification in their idols; many other Jews were humbled in the sight of the LORD as He intended (Jeremiah 44:1-6). When we suffer from calamity, how do we respond? Will we, as many whose minds are darkened by the world, blame God, find a reason to deny or reject the faith, or in some other way turn to some modern idol (cf. Romans 1:21)? Such persons are lost forever! On the other hand, we can learn from calamity and be strengthened in our faith, being more like James and finding reason to rejoice in the testing of our faith (James 1:2-4). We must remember that God chastens those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6-11). Let us turn our minds toward God and away from all idols!

For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death, (2 Corinthians 7:10).

By Ethan R. Longhenry
From Expository Files 14.2; February 2007

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Running From God

Jeremiah 52:1-11

The sad end of the earthly throne of the house of David was accomplished by the siege and fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. The last descendant of David to rule as a king of a physical nation of Zedekiah. He was a young and wicked man. *"Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king...And he did evil in the sight of the LORD"* (Jer. 52:1,2).

For eleven years of national devastation, moral degeneration and increasing affliction of God's righteous people (epitomized by the suffering of Jeremiah the prophet), this man ruled without much thought of God. When he did think of God his reasonings were only defiant. Maybe he thought that the threatening words of Jeremiah, like those of other prophets before him, concerning the destruction of the city and temple would never be seen in his day. Zedekiah believed that somehow God's punishments would not fall of him. There was no rational basis for this belief, but it is a stubborn conviction shared by many. The apostle Peter warned us concerning the mocking of mockers, who say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." (2 Pet. 3:3)

How do men arrive at this conclusion? Is it a wrong conclusion garnered the patience of God? Many think that a delay in threatened punishment means that no punishment will ever come. But this is short-sighted, for a study of God's dealings with man always shows that, in the end, God's threats surely do come to pass, even if they be a long time in coming. Do men think that the past favor of God (such as former fellowship and blessings given) will protect them against the punishment of current sins? As we trust in God not to forget past faithfulness we must also know the same Omniscience and Justice knows of our current activities.

So in Zedekiah's case, *"For through the anger of the LORD this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence."* (Jer. 52:3) Fellowship with God was lost. They may have been Jews; they may have been daily in and around the Temple; they may have been descendants of David - but they were no longer God's people. He was done with them. So *"Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it, and built a siege wall all around it."* (Jer. 52:4) It took a long time for this to come, but when it did it was thorough, protracted, horrible and, because God occasioned it, it was successful.

The suffering of the people during the eighteen month siege is described in simple facts of historical record in verse 6. "The famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land." Jeremiah gives fuller detail in his sad lamentation. "See, O LORD, and look! With whom hast

Thou dealt thus? Should women eat their offspring, The little ones who were born healthy? Should priest and prophet be slain In the sanctuary of the Lord?" (Lam. 2:20)

Such a horrible end of those who had been God's people. Pagans burned the temple, palaces, and houses of the city. (52:12,13) The ornaments the temple and all its implements were removed to Babylon. (52:17-23) High priests and royal officials were killed. (52:24-27) The people were deported to a foreign land. (52:28-30) How pathetic an end for them. Such a grim end that God had to bring on them.

But what of Zedekiah? Did he wait in the palace for the soldiers to come arrest him? Did he perish in the flames while barricaded to resist capture? Did he take a sword and fight with his men? Did he kneel in prayer? No, he cut and ran. "[A]ll the men of war fled and went forth from the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls which was by the king's garden..." (Jer. 52:7) From a prophecy of Ezekiel we learn that this was a disgraceful and inglorious break out through a hole in the wall. "And the prince who is among them will load his baggage on his shoulder in the dark and go out. They will dig a hole through the wall to bring it out. He will cover his face so that he can not see the land with his eyes." (Ezk. 12:12)

So they ran like thieves, but Ezekiel said that they would not get away, "I shall also spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare." (Ezk. 12:13) They made it only about 15 miles, and "the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon." (Jer. 52:8,9)

Zedekiah's situation quickly went from bad to worse. His sons were killed before his eyes. (Jer. 52:10) And so that this calamity would be the last thing he ever saw, Nebuchadnezzar "[blinded the eyes of Zedekiah.](#)" Then he "[bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon, and put him in prison until the day of his death.](#)" (Jer. 52:11)

Zedekiah was unable to live a life of rebellion and still have a good end. If we might summarize his life in a few words: He was: wicked, troubled, sieged, running, caught, blinded, imprisoned, and then dead. Surely the words of Jeremiah were fulfilled, "[Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days.](#)" (Jer. 22:30)

Yes, the rebellious life always ends disastrously. You can no more run from God's punishment than Jonah could run from His presence - yet many will try. Men have always tried to sow the wind without reaping the whirlwind. They try to sow to the flesh and not reap corruption. They shall keep on trying to live a life of sin and not go to hell. And none will succeed. We will not prosper in sin. We will not be successful in running from the fires of hell. Zedekiah couldn't run that fast. I can't run that fast. You can't run that fast.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 7.12; December 2000

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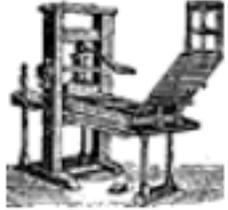
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

"How Lonely Sits the City"

Lamentations 1:1-22

"I told you so! I said this would happen!" But did you listen? No-o-o-o!"

The book of Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah following the fulfillment of his prophecies of doom and gloom concerning the fate of disobedient and faithless Judah. The book is essentially an expression of loyalty to God as well as a confession of national sin and sorrow over the consequences.

The book is poetic in nature, like the Psalms or the Book of Job, though it is listed with the prophecies rather than with the poetry of the Old Testament. Jeremiah took no joy in seeing his prophecies come to pass. He had been watching a moral and spiritual national train wreck for decades and knew that disaster would be the ultimate result.

The five chapters of the book of Lamentations are actually five mournful poetic works describing the devastation and sorrow of Israel and Judah and especially Jerusalem. Judgment and Divine reckoning had come upon the unrepentant land.

The Lonely City

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!
(Lamentations 1:1)

The destruction of Jerusalem had been complete. The temple was destroyed and its treasures had become loot for Babylon. The walls of Jerusalem were broken. All that remained of the city was rubble.

Disobedience and neglect of God and His will certainly brings destruction. The most precious things in our lives today can be lost just as certainly as the Judeans lost theirs. The warm fellowship of our

brethren, the stability and assurance and joy that true faith brings to the human heart, the good example we can be for our family, friends and neighbors can all be lost. "In the days of her affliction and homelessness Jerusalem remembers all her precious things that were from the days of old..." (Lamentations 1:7).

Even as the calamity befell Jerusalem, how many fearful and hopeless hearts appealed for more opportunities to repent? "Please Lord, let us start over!" But the opportunities had passed. The consequences of being a partaker in the generations of sin and neglect had now arrived. The Day of Reckoning is too late to make the changes. Today is the day of salvation!

The Broken Alliances

Those that Jerusalem had depended upon for help had turned their backs on her; "All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies." (Lamentations 1:2). Jeremiah had long warned against depending on human alliances rather than depending upon God. King Zedekiah, son of Josiah had asked Jeremiah to pray for the nation but he would not listen to Jeremiah's counsel. Jeremiah had warned him, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Thus you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come out for your assistance is going to return to its own land of Egypt. The Chaldeans will also return and fight against this city, and they will capture it and burn it with fire." (Jeremiah 37:7-8). And now, that of which Jeremiah had spoken had come to pass. No help came from Egypt on the day of disaster.

Friendship with the world will bring similar results today. Judah had sought to secure itself in its pact with Egypt. This had given them false confidence and hope. They had boldly rebelled against the Lord while proclaiming that they had nothing to fear by doing so. But their dependence upon their alliance with Egypt and adopting the immoralities and idolatries of their friends was nothing but hostility toward the true and living God. "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4).

We must not overestimate the assurances of a world that often seeks to minimize or mock the value of living by faith in God. The world's treasures and assurances are all empty on the Day of Reckoning. Faith overcomes the world. "Blessed assurance! Jesus is mine!" There is nothing more sure than this. "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. " (1 John 2:17).

The False Gods

"The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against His command; " (Lamentations 1:18). Judah had indeed rebelled against the command of Jehovah. Before the destruction had come, Jeremiah had asked some penetrating questions concerning the gods in which the people were now placing their confidence. As the day approached, Jeremiah had asked,

"But where are your gods

Which you made for yourself?
Let them arise, if they can save you
In the time of your trouble;
For according to the number of your cities
Are your gods, O Judah." (Jeremiah 2:28)

All those gods, but no deliverance. As Babylon laid siege to the city, the imprisoned Jeremiah had chastised king and nation with the question "Where then are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, "The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land'?" (Jeremiah 37:19). Because Jeremiah had spoken the truth, this great friend of Judah was accused of being a traitor.

But while Jeremiah was a prisoner, his prophecy was not imprisoned. It would still come to pass. Likewise, we should not allow the world and its gods to silence the word. We shall speak it and live it. The Day of Reckoning is coming!

What Could Have Been

This disaster never had to be. We do not have to wait until the Day of Reckoning comes and we are full of regret. A ruined Jerusalem mourned, "See, O LORD, for I am in distress; My spirit is greatly troubled; My heart is overturned within me..." (Lamentations 1:20). But it never had to turn out that way. It doesn't for us either.

But that is up to us just as it was up to them. We can choose the course of our lives with little or no regard for the Lord's counsel, and we will see distress on the Day of Reckoning. But there is a clear alternative. We can overcome the world and the Day will be one of joy and victory. "You, O LORD, rule forever; Your throne is from generation to generation... Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old," (Lamentations 5:19-21).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 13.12; December 2006

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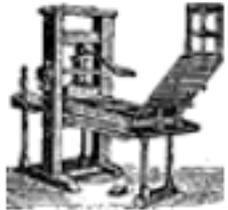
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Appearance of the Likeness of the Glory of the Lord

Ezekiel 1

It has never been an easy thing to think about God. I can talk about His attributes easily enough. I can say He is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, glorious, love and righteousness. But I cannot come up with a mental picture of God. Others have tried to and have failed. He does not look like man, or any other creature of flesh and blood. God is spirit. (John 4:24; Luke 24:36-39; Romans 1:21-23).

But we do have a picture of God's glory. Want to see it?

It is a "word picture" which is designed to bring to our minds a mental image that expresses something about God's glory in terms the human mind can comprehend. It was not concocted by the imperfect mind of man, but rather a picture God chose Himself. Let's look at the picture God paints of Himself!

Ezekiel's Vision

"...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God... the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest... in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD was upon him." (Ezekiel 1:1-3).

This occurred in the 5th month of the year 593 B.C. We know this from the information given in verse two.

Ezekiel was far from home. He, along with ten thousand other leaders of Judah, had been taken into captivity during the first deportation by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (or Chaldea). Soon, according to prophecy, there would be yet more deportations and finally the city of Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed. This would also be fulfilled the following decade.

Ezekiel and others were relocated by the River of Chebar. Recent excavations have uncovered Jewish settlements there giving further evidence that this account is historically accurate.

It is here that the "word of the Lord" came to Ezekiel in the form of a vision. In dealing with visions and their meanings, it is best to keep it simple. For example, if I say "cat" you picture a "cat" in your mind. You do not get bogged down with the history of the word; the sound one makes when he says the word, and so forth. Just look at the symbols shown to Ezekiel and consider what each one might suggest about God.

God's Purpose

"And as I looked, behold, a great storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire." (Ezekiel 1:4).

In verse 4-21, we have a description of heavenly purposes being fulfilled. The words "like" and "likeness" occurs some 15 times in these verses. This suggests the inadequacy of human language to convey exactly what Ezekiel saw. The best that could be done was to find earthly things in the human experience that were "like" the things in the vision.

Out of the dark cloud descending from the north Ezekiel sees figures resembling four living things (vs. 5). They looked somewhat human in form, but closer examination shows otherwise. They each had four wings (freedom of movement) faces (seeing every direction; vs. 6). This would suggest ability to know and act in whatever way God commands.

Their feet were glowing (purity of purpose; vs. 7) and hands (helping hands; working hands; vs. 8). Their faces never changed direction (singleness of purpose; vs. 9). The four faces on each creature were different (vs. 10). Each had the face of a man (reason); lion (majesty); ox (strength) and eagle (swiftness).

The tips of their wings touched one another (unity; vs 11). There was flashes of light coming from the midst of these beings, perhaps suggesting judgment (vs. 13,14). There is a description of wheels (vs. 16-21). Forget about designing one of these yourself! Suggested is that the steady, ongoing work of God will continue through all obstacles and conflict. God's purpose will always prevail!

God in His Glory

"Now, over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse... above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, and on that which resembled a throne was a figure..." (Ezekiel 1:22-26).

First, we are called to look at the throne of God, sitting on something like an awesome, gleaming crystal platform (vs. 22,23). This vision is complete with audio, and there are three similes used to describe the sounds Ezekiel was hearing (vs. 24,25). There was the sound like abundant waters; the sound like the voice of the Almighty (thunder; Psalm 29:3,5) and the sound like that of an army on the move. These sounds came from the wings of the creatures. When the wings stopped, so did the sounds.

The figure on the throne was like that of a man, but the upper portion was like glowing metal with fire all around it. The lower portion was like fire, and there was a radiant, multi-colored glow all around Him, like a rainbow, the sign of hope (vs. 26-28). Out of the dark, flashing cloud of judgment comes peace and hope. Other passages also describe the glory of God (Exodus 33:20; 19:16-18; 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10).

God then speaks to Ezekiel. "Then He said to me, 'Son of man, stand up that I may speak to you!' (Ezekiel 2:1). He speaks to Ezekiel about judgment upon the people for their faithlessness. He

speaks to Ezekiel of his mission to speak to them whether they will listen or not. He also speaks of mercy which will be extended to those who will repent.

God still speaks to us today. It is the same God; no different from the One of Ezekiel's vision. His purposes will be accomplished. He has not been silent and speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:3). We'd best be listening to and obeying Him!

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 8.8; August 2001

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

"The Soul That Sinneth"

Ezekiel 18

If there is one thing that a preacher must do, it is to help people understand that they are responsible for their own actions. It is easy to blame a spouse or a job and claim that their presence is a hinderance or stumbling block. Many times people seek to justify themselves by claiming that sinning is just a part of their nature. While in all actuality it should be just the opposite. If everything we do or say has to be credited to nature, we should argue that it is our nature to do right, considering that we were created in the image of God. The truth remains, that man is a free moral agent and has been created with the power of choice. And people will never correct their mistakes as long as they continue to blame others for their own sinful actions.

Ezekiel 18 pivots around a proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge". In effect, the children of Israel were chanting , "we are being blamed for our father's sins". Does this sound familiar? It should, considering that John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian church, resurrected this philosophy in the early 1500's and became famous for his doctrine of Inherited Depravity. Nevertheless, God's answer still remains the same and it is found in this text.

In Ezekiel 18:4 God said, "Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die". The soul that dies is the soul that sins. Therefore, in order for a soul to die, sin would have to occur by that soul. The apostle John stated it much clearer in 1John 3:4. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law". Sin is something that you do, not something that you inherit. According to John, you have to transgress the law (God's law), to be a sinner. Little babies can not be sinners because they have never transgressed law. Therefore, upon that premise alone the Inherited sin theory falls. Nevertheless, there is another perspective and that is the physical aspect of inheritance. Every trait that you and I have is inherited. The color of your eyes, skin pigment, hair, height, weight, and many other things. It is my understanding that every inherited characteristic is found on a chromosome in an allelic pair. I wonder, on what part of the chromosomes does the sin gene reside? That is, if sin really is inherited.

God reveals an explanation to the dilemma immediately by using examples of three individuals. God has an estimate of every man that ever lived. In verses 5 & 9 God explains, "But if a man be just, and do that

which is lawful and right,..." "Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgements, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God". This man was a good man. He obeyed the Lord and was blessed by God. However, he had a son that was not so good. "If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things..." "he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die, his blood shall be upon him" (v. 10 & 13). Here is a son who has done evil things in his life and will die because of it. It was not the fault of his father nor was this sin alluded to his father in any way. He opted to sin by using the power of choice. Every man has been created with the same ability, to choose right from wrong. Again, the Lord offers another example, the grandson. "Now if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like,..." "he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live" (v. 14 & 17). Each man stood as individuals before God and God has an estimate of each one including you and me! The apostle Paul put it rather aptly, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ: that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2Corinthians 5:10).

In verse 25 the Lord says, "Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal." What these folks were actually claiming was that God is not fair. "Lord, we just don't think you are fair". In fact, every time a person preaches or teaches that people are born in sin or have inherited sin from their parents, is saying nothing less than "Lord you are not fair".

Every man is responsible for his own actions. We ca not blame our parents for our sins nor can we blame inheritance or God. "The soul that sins, it shall die".

By Tony Ripley
From Expository Files 5.5; May 1998

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Sour Grapes

Ezekiel 18

How do people ever come to the point where they can treat one another so badly as many do today. They have lost all sense of compassion as they have lowered themselves, in behavior at least, to the level of animals, ruled by instinct and oblivious to any sense of right and wrong.

A favorite way to deal with one's misdeeds today is to simply blame them on somebody else. It is the parents' fault, or the husband's, or the wife's, or peers', or society's. And, oh! What misdeeds the previous generations did to bring us to such. It's all their fault, of course, that we are reeling from the upheavals that plague our nation. It's not our fault! Is it?

This is not the first generation to excuse its rotten behavior and the physical suffering it produces on previous generations. It is not the first to echo the plaintive cry, "We are not responsible!" Notice what the Lord had to say when people of Ezekiel's day made a similar complaint:

"Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'What do you mean by this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.'" (EZEKIEL 18:1-3).

It had become a fashionable thing to say, a common excuse to blame the plight of the nation of Israel on the previous generations. It is not that those generations were without fault, they were not, it is just that the present generation shared the responsibility for their plight. They had drawn a clever picture of a parent eating a sour grape but the children's teeth being set on edge as if to say they were only innocent victims and not to blame for their suffering and error. The Lord told them to stop using that ridiculous proverb because it wasn't true. It's not true today either.

BACKGROUND TO EZEKIEL

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, I am sending you to the Sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me to this very day; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.'" (EZEKIEL 2:1-3). Ezekiel was a young man when he had been taken into exile. He was of the priestly family, and he received the summons of God to become a prophet among the captives in Babylon. It was in Ezekiel's fifth year of captivity that he received his call; about 592 B.C. and he prophesied from then until 570 B.C.

These were some of the most distressing times in Judah's history. It is during this period that Jerusalem is destroyed. The people are crushed and know little of the God they had abandoned. Ezekiel's message explains the judgment that the nation was receiving from the Lord as a result of their apostasy, as well as foretells of a brighter future and calls the people to repentance. Many of Ezekiel's generation were blaming their fathers for their predicament, which was easy to do but served no purpose. In fact, it worked against them, because as long as they were blaming someone else for their problems they would not be seeking to make the needed corrections in their own lives. That is the essential message of the eighteenth chapter; Wake up and accept responsibility for yourselves and do something to make things better. It occurs to me that the same message is sorely needed by our own society today, where more often than not, the chief defense in courts of law is no longer "I didn't do it" but rather "It's someone else's fault I did it." Tragically for our society and our families, it seems to be working. One can literally get away with murder!

THE WAY IT REALLY IS

"Behold, all souls are Mine; the souls of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die." (EZEKIEL 18:4). The people were somewhat bewildered by their captivity. They were complaining and becoming cynical. Yes, they agreed, Manasseh had been a very wicked king and had led the nation into the worst kinds of idolatry. What they failed to realize was that they, too, had many shortcomings, certainly not to the same extent as Manasseh, but things in their own lives needed correcting.

What God wants out of his people in any dark age is courageous heroism. He desires the kind of man or woman who will take their stand based upon what is right and stay there even if their society is swept away. Ezekiel points out that each soul is directly responsible as an individual unto God. Also, the destiny of each soul directly relates as to whether one is willing to accept his or her responsibility for conduct, turn from sin and unto righteousness, and serve God.

"...if he walks by My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully - he is righteous and will surely live..." (EZEKIEL 18:9).

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

"Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear punishment for the father's iniquity?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the sons iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." (EZEKIEL 18:19,20). God declares that we are all individually responsible for our own conduct. Ezekiel affirms that none of us are condemned to spiritual death because of another's sins. My father's righteousness will not save me, nor will his wickedness condemn me. I do not inherit my spiritual standing with God from my ancestors. Though I may suffer some of the consequences for their sins, as well as enjoy some of the consequences of their righteousness, my standing with God is based upon my own actions.

Also, notice it is not enough to merely know the way of righteousness, or agree with it, but one must

practice it. How fashionable it is today to suggest that obedience unto God is unimportant. Mark it down! The one who fails to obey the commandments of God will suffer spiritual death (ROMANS 6:23).

GOD IS JUST

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?" (EZEKIEL 18:25). It is blind and foolish men who will say that their ways are right and God's ways are wrong! Yet, we find that is exactly what many are saying today, just like in Ezekiel's day.

Our nation seems to have cast aside the Scriptures as the moral foundation for our system. The farther we move away from it, the worse things become. Humanist and atheistic influences grow stronger in higher places such as government and the media, and as they do the suffering in our country increases. They insist that God's word is obsolete as they cast aside its moral and ethical teachings. For example, the Scriptures condemn homosexuality, but the politically correct says homosexuality is a fine, noble thing. In this, they echo the words of those of Ezekiel's day: "The way of the Lord is not right." to which the answer comes; "Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?"

Those that continue to live by the Scriptures are openly ridiculed as ignorant or bigoted. Things will not get better for any nation that turns away from God. Yes, God needs heroes of faith today. You should be one of them!

GOD IS PATIENT

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live.'" (EZEKIEL 18:23). The Lord has no pleasure in the condemnation of the wicked. There is one way to get out of this mess happy, hopeful and blessed. We must simply repent of the wrong in our lives and obey God. Judgment is coming.

"Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord God. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away all your transgressions which you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?" (EZEKIEL 18:30,31).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 1.10; October, 1994

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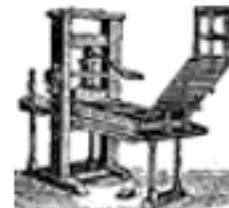


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Do We Inherit the Guilt of Adam's Sin?

Ezekiel 18:19-32

The doctrine of original sin states that all of us are born sinners. Our parents pass along the guilt of Adam and Eve's original transgression to us, their children, even as they received the same from their parents, and so on, back to the fall of man in the garden.

John Calvin said, "Again, I ask: whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many peoples, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God?" He concluded by saying, "The decree is dreadful, I confess." (Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 2, page 955).

One human written religious creed, the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, says, "They (Adam and Eve - J. Q.) being the root, and, by God's appointment... the guilt of sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation, being now conceived in sin..."

Let us consider this teaching in light of what the Scriptures actually say. If the Bible teaches it, then it is true. If not, then it is false. It matters not how widespread the teaching is, who believes it, or what the creed books written by men say.

Is the Guilt of Sin Inherited?

"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment of the father's iniquity; nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be on himself." (Ezekiel 18:20; cf. vss. 19-32). Though there are many passages that contradict the doctrine of original sin, I can think of none that do it stronger than these verses in Ezekiel. The Lord has said, "Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," (Ezekiel 18:30). Any doctrine that says we are judged by the conduct of our ancestors, including Adam's, is clearly wrong.

While we are here, compare Calvin's statement quoted earlier with the following Scripture:

God: "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies." (vs. 32).

Calvin: "...so many peoples, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God?"

Many other passages also show the impossibility of transferring the guilt of sin (Jeremiah 31:27-30;

Deuteronomy 24:16; Galatians 6:5).

The Definition of Sin

"Everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4). Sin is an act of unrighteousness. It is something we do. It is an act that is lawless, or contrary to God's law. The Bible never refers to sin as something that we are born with. It is never defined in God's word as a natural weakness or an inherited trait.

For example, the Lord commands, "Thou shall not commit murder." I am not a murderer unless I commit an act that violates that command.

While it is true that all of Adam's descendants pay the consequences of Adam's sin (i.e., we live in a cursed world; we suffer physical death, etc.) that is not the same thing as being guilty of Adam's sin. A child of a drunkard may suffer the consequences of his parent's misbehavior, but this does not mean the child himself is guilty of drunkenness.

The Consequences of the Fall

"Then to Adam He said, 'Because you ... have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it.."' (Genesis 3:17; see context: vss. 14-24). One reads in vain for the idea of original sin in the account of man's fall as related in the Bible. Genesis records many consequences resulting from the first transgression. There is pain in childbirth, the ground is cursed, and physical death (the body returning to dust) is decreed. But nothing at all about children inheriting the guilt of Adam's sin.

What About This?

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5). Some take David's words to mean that he was born a sinner, but that is not what he said. He said that his mother brought him forth in sin. He was born into a sinful world. So are we and our children. The lure of sin effects us as we grow up. It is all around us from birth.

Some also point to another Psalm (Psalm 58:3), but it, too, says the wicked "go astray" not "born astray". In their hearts they "work unrighteousness" and "weigh out violence" (vs. 2). It is from birth that evil influences begin to work on the innocent one, working estrangement from God.

Born Innocent

"Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3). This certainly does not sound like Jesus looked upon children as being totally depraved in sin. This is such a different view of children from how Calvin saw them!

We do inherit things from our parents, but those things do not include sin. We inherit our physical traits from our earthly parents. We inherit our spiritual traits from God. He is therefore called "the Father of spirits" in a passage plainly discussing the spirits of human beings (Hebrews 12:9). Paul refers to us as being "the offspring of God" (Acts 17:28,29). Who dares say our spirit is already tainted by sin at birth.

This unbiblical doctrine brought yet another dilemma that had to be dealt with. How does one explain how Jesus, the sinless One, was born without inheriting Adam's sin through Mary? Catholicism devised the doctrine of the "immaculate conception" of Mary. She was born without sin, and had none to pass on to Jesus. But, where, pray tell, is that in the Bible? Instead, it says that He became "flesh and blood" as we are because He "had to be made like His brethren in all things" This does not involve inheriting sin, He is without sin (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15).

A final point to be made is one of accountability. God does not demand of us or hold us accountable for that which we cannot help. Jesus, for example, said, "If you were blind, you would have no sin" (John 10:41). Jesus is talking about being unable to comprehend right and wrong. Infants have no sin because God does not hold them accountable. Paul referred to this early stage in his life as well . He was spiritually "alive" but then "when sin became alive" he died (Romans 7:9).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 6.6; June 1999

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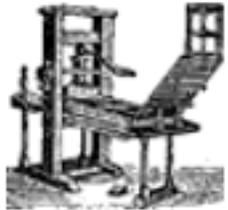

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Valley Of Dry Bones

(Ezekiel 37:1-3)

The prophet Ezekiel was a captive along with the rest of the nation of Israel. The nation had fallen away from God in sin and rebellion. God had withdrawn His protection and blessings. This resulted in Israel being conquered by their enemies. They were captives, and their cities lay in rubble. It seemed as if there would never again be a nation of Israel. The nation had died spiritually when they had forsaken God, and they had died physically when they were taken to serve in foreign lands. In one such land, Ezekiel was given a vision from the Lord.

Ezekiel wrote: "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest.'" (Ezek. 37:1-3).

Then, Ezekiel gazed in amazement as flesh and muscle formed on the bones and finally life was breathed into them. God was picturing for the prophet in a very graphic way that He can also do the same thing for a dead nation. There would be a resurrection of a dead nation, and there was.

God was not through with Israel yet because the Messiah was yet to be born. The prophets had said He would come through the descendants of Jacob, or Israel. That is one reason why God restored the nation under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Redeemer was coming.

But not only that, the Lord can do the same thing for a spiritually dead individual. He can give purpose and meaning to a wasted life. Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and more abundantly." (John 10:10). He is the resurrection and the life.

By Jon W. Quinn
Front Page

From Expository Files 11.2; February, 2004

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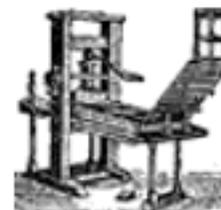


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Oh 'Dem Bones!

Ezekiel 37:1-27

The old song is a very basic anatomy lesson. To sing it you've got to know that "the thigh bone is connected to the knee bone" and so forth. The song talks about "those dry bones" and "those je-umping bones". Sounds a lot like some kind of spooky song that skeletons would sing in a haunted house. So, people may wonder why a song that seems more fitting to Halloween would also include the refrain: "Hear the word of the Lord."

The reason is this: the song is based on a Biblical passage that is dead serious and not comical at all. It was Ezekiel the prophet who told of God granting him a vision "by the Spirit", setting him "down in the middle of the valley, and it was full of bones." (Ezekiel 37:1). Let us see what Ezekiel saw in the valley, and what "'dem bones" signify.

Resurrection

"And He caused me to pass among them and round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley and lo, they were very dry." (Ezekiel 37:2).

The significance of dry bones is that they have been there a long time. These are the bones of the long dead, bleached white in the sun. The Lord asks Ezekiel an intriguing question: "Son of man, can these bones live?" to which Ezekiel, playing it safe, answers, "O Lord, God, Thou knowest." (vss. 2,3). Many things are impossible with man, but not with God (Matthew 19:26). With man, the answer is "no". But with God the answer will be "yes". This is a principle that every believer would do well remember during life's difficulties and in times when tough decisions must be made.

Ezekiel is told to prophesy over the bones, encouraging them to "Hear the word of the Lord." What is the significance of all this? Is the Lord just trying to scare Ezekiel out of his wits? Hardly! There is a reason for all this, and it goes beyond merely teaching about God's power to raise the dead as well, though His power to do so is used to illustrate the point being made.

God-breathed Life

"Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, put breath in you that you may come alive and know that I am the Lord.'" (Ezekiel 37:5,6).

It was the breath of God by which man became a living soul reflecting the image of God at creation (Genesis 2:7). It was the breath of God which inspired men to prophesy and to write the words which we now have as Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:20,21). Here, God promises to put the breath of life back into these long dead bones.

Imagine for a moment Ezekiel's wonderment about being placed in such a gruesome valley, surrounded by the spectacle of death. And now, comes the promise of life from the Source of life Himself. And then, as Ezekiel prophesies over the bones, they begin to rattle as they come back together, each "bone to its bone" (vs. 7). Following this, sinew and flesh reform over the bones and then the breath of God come from four directions and those long dead live again (vss. 8-10)! Marvelous and wonderful! But still, what does all "dem je-umping bones" mean?

Physical Israel

"The He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'" (Ezekiel 37:11).

Ezekiel was a captive with the rest of his people Israel in far away Babylon. Israel and Judah had been completely destroyed; cities torn down; and strangers brought in from foreign lands to populate small towns among the ruins. Even the mighty temple Solomon had built to honor Jehovah, the God Israel had rebelled against, lay in ruins. It was all gone; everything. Israel had been crushed beyond repair, and everyone knew it; the Israelites, the Babylonians, the strangers (later known as "Samaritans"), the Egyptians, and everyone else in the ancient world. Israel was gone for good.

Through the vision of the dry bones, God informed Ezekiel, and through him the captive nation, that God can restore life to even long dead, dry bones; "Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you to the land of Israel" (vs. 12). The grave here is captivity. Israel will again be a nation. God had made a promise to Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Moses, David and others that through Israel the Messiah would come. He had not come as yet in Ezekiel's day, so for God's promise not to fail God would restore the dead nation to life.

The Lord mentions some interesting specifics about this restored nation to come. He specifies that it will be restored on the same territory as it had occupied previously (vs. 21). It was. He also specifies that it will be no longer two nations, but one (vs. 22). During Rehoboam's reign, the nation had split in two; north (Israel) and south (Judah). It was foretold here that when Israel would be restored, it would again be one nation. It was. Also, though idolatry had been such a grievous and recurring problem in the past, the Lord says it will not be so in the future (vs. 23). It wasn't. Never again did Israel succumb to idol worship as a nation.

Spiritual Israel

"And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them." (Ezekiel 37:24).

This passage reminds us of many Messianic prophecies concerning God's spiritual kingdom to be

established by One to come through David. The Davidic line will continue beyond the captivity. It is not surprising that since physical Israel was a "type" or "shadow" of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, that His rule would be paralleled with David's, and that the church, or spiritual Zion would be parallel with the old Zion. Jesus is king over spiritual Israel, the church, and has been since its beginning (Mark 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 2:30-33; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 1:8).

The Lord also promised Ezekiel; "And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.: (Ezekiel 37:26). Note the following points on this verse:

God promised Ezekiel that He will make a new, "everlasting covenant" of peace with new Israel. This He has done through His Son, Jesus (Hebrews 8:6; 1:1,2). Jesus, Himself has become our peace (Ephesians 2:14,17). Where enmity once existed, reconciliation between man and God is made possible on the basis of the blood which ratified this new covenant (Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:9,10).

The Lord promised to "place and multiply" them. This reminds us of our spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and how God works with us to "provide the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). If God be for us, who shall be against us?

The Lord promises to set His "sanctuary in their midst forever." We recall how Jesus had told the woman of Samaria that the hour had arrived for God to remove His sanctuary from Jerusalem and into the hearts of all men and women who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:20-24). This is also brought out when Paul refers to both the local church (disciples) collectively (1 Corinthians 3:16) as well as the individual disciple (1 Corinthians 6:19) as the "temple" of God.

Yes, "'dem bones" are alive and well. The Lord has taken that which was spiritually dead in sin, and through the power of Jesus' blood has given both life and hope. Such things are not impossible with God (Ephesians 2:1-10).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 3.9; September 1996

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God Answered Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 3:15

He defeated the world's mightiest armies, managed its wealthiest empire and built one of its most beautiful cities. During more than 40 years as king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar accomplished much. But one day, he was humiliated by three faithful Jews.

Nebuchadnezzar is known for the elaborate pagan temples he built in Babylon. It is not surprising that such an accomplished king would invite all his government officials to witness the dedication of the impressive image of gold that he erected. As he looked with pride at the image, 60 feet high, he ordered that all present bow down to worship it.

When the king learned that three men had directly disobeyed his order, he was furious. He gave them a second chance, but they still would not bow to the image. When Nebuchadnezzar became furious, they calmly replied that, whether God saved them or not, they would not serve the false god. The king challenged their faith: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Daniel 3:15).

God answered Nebuchadnezzar's challenge with an unforgettable display of Divine power that humbled the mighty king of Babylon. Soldiers threw the three disobedient Jews into a fire that was so hot that the soldiers died when they approached the fire. But as Nebuchadnezzar peered into the furnace, he saw four men - the three he had condemned and one sent by God to protect these faithful servants. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar realized that God had answered his challenge. He ordered that the name of Jehovah be respected in all his kingdom, and realized that God had answered his question: ". . . because there is no other God who can deliver like this" (Daniel 3:29).

Sin tries to take hold in our lives and challenges us as Nebuchadnezzar challenged the servants of God. Who can set us free? There is only one correct response (Acts 4:12).

By Dennis Allen
From Expository Files 5.4; April 1998

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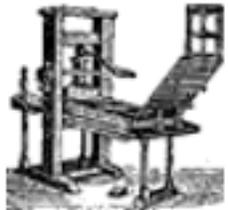
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Daniel's Faith And God's Providence At Work

Daniel 6

There are many characters in the Bible that intrigue the human mind of the present economy. There are those who are mentioned many times and then there are faithful servants of whom we hear little about. As a youngster, I had a Bible with portraits scattered throughout the pages. I found myself going back to the scene of Daniel in the den of lions over and over. It was not to see what Daniel looked like, because even then I had been taught that modern portraits were without valid foundation. But the serene pose of a servant of God standing midst a violent army of starved, flesh eating animals was enough to make me stare for a while. I gazed with awe at a character, unafraid and waiting for deliverance. At the time I know I didn't understand the significance of it all, but it really took me back. Through the years I have found it comforting to spend some time getting to know this character better through the pages of the inspired record. And though being dead many years he has helped me become a better servant of the God of heaven.

The relationship between God and Daniel was one for every person to sit up and take notice of. Daniel from a child loved God with all his heart and soul. Jesus expressed this attitude to his disciples and for good cause. It was the very attitude of all who faithfully served Him. This scene in the lion's den really begins in the first chapter of Daniel where he was brought to Babylon with other Hebrew children to serve in a barbaric system far remote from what they had ever been accustomed to. Yet as a child, he brought with him more than hands to grind with and feet to trod with. He brought his undying faith in the Creator. His backbone and sense of loyalty to God earned him the position of leadership in a godless kingdom. The doors of opportunity were obvious on every hand and Daniel used them all to glorify his Master. With God's help he stood for his convictions, revealed the meanings of dreams and won the respect and admiration of men even in thresholds of great power. The king denied his own philosophers just to hear the words of the servant Daniel.

By the time chapter 6 comes to view, Daniel has seen plenty. He has survived the bungled leadership of Nebuchadnezzar and his son, and now finds himself under new management with new rules live by. Nevertheless, Daniel's purpose and convictions have remained unchanged and without compromise.

There are several points in chapter six that are especially interesting however. Darius was the king of a new empire, Medo-Persia. The laws of the new kingdom were brutal and discriminatory. Yet, Daniel through it all seemed to prevail. Being the chief of three presidents which held rank over 120 princes and other counselors, Daniel's faith was the most apparent. Out of jealousy the leaders under the king

devised to destroy Daniel but knew that the only way they could be successful was to "find occasion concerning the law of his God."

Isn't it obvious the influence Daniel had on everyone? These men knew that Daniel was so faithful to God that he would never compromise his worship. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all Christians today influenced others in the same way. The boss would always know without doubt where his Christian employee would be when the saints were assembled. The coach would always know where Johnny would be when the saints were worshiping and would not fathom that he would show up to play when he could be worshiping with the saints. The keeper of the dock would know that the Christian's boat would be idle, that the Christian's golf clubs would be neatly tucked in the trunk of the car, and relatives would not question where their folks were during the time of worship. It would be understood by others that Christians are determined to serve God at all cost without compromise.

This was the case with Daniel and everyone knew it! After the king naively signed the decree that no one was to worship any person or object except the king for thirty days, Daniel just did as he always had done. He simply knelt in prayer where he had knelt yesterday and the day before. Daniel knew the consequences of violating the decree. But he knew more of the consequence compromising would have on all who esteemed him and the affect it would have on his Father in heaven.

This is one reason why I love Daniel and thank God for the example left to imitate. It is also interesting to note that the decree was only for thirty days. The law stated that a decree once signed by the king could not be changed. Yet this law would only last for thirty days. Daniel's enemies knew it would not take more than this to indict him. In fact they probably knew it would take no more than a day. Daniel's history had been proof of it. Daniel could have reasoned in his heart as many Christians do today. He could have looked at it as only thirty days that he would have to stop worshiping and then he could safely continue on as he had before. But it is obvious that Daniel's faith was so great that there was no room for one compromise in his life as a servant of the Lord.

How many Christians today would just sit it out for the thirty days and wait for a more convenient time to worship? This was not an eternal decree, just thirty days! What would thirty days hurt? I can hear the reasoning now. By the history of some, I am persuaded that the numbers would be few on the Lord's day if such a decree were signed today. However, there would be those few that would show up to worship and all who knew them would not be surprised because their lives have shown nothing short of determined faith and loyalty to the Lord. Yes, they would be thrown in the den of lions and possibly lose their lives, but only to live forever in the bosom of God. To many, compromise for thirty days would seem justified, but to God, Daniel and others like him, unacceptable.

Verse 20 reveals the influence Daniel had on the king. Darius said, "is thy God whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions?". Darius knew that Daniel was a servant of the Lord even in a kingdom that wanted nothing to do with his God. He had been impressed by the character of Daniel in such a way that he became almost submissive. The sleepless night and fasting was probably new for the king in such a situation. No doubt, countless people had been thrown to these lions before and no sleep was lost by the king in those cases, or at least that is my speculation. But Daniel was different. He went against everything that the king stood for spiritually and yet he was his closest confidant. He

served the God of heaven among a world of pagan idols and still the king rejoices over his deliverance. You have to ask yourself, What kind of man can accomplish so much and influence so many? It is a man determined to serve the Lord, period!

Finally, Darius made comments which imply certain knowledge of specific details which pre-dated his reign. He called upon the people to tremble before the God of Daniel. He called him the "living God, steadfast forever". And made mention to the "kingdom which would never be destroyed" (v. 26). It is evident that the message of king Nebuchadnezzar's dream was known even by Darius. Because of Daniel's faith and influence the king issued a life-long decree, unchangeable. Talk about providence! Unknown to the king at the time that his kingdom was quickly fading away and about to enter the hands of another tyrant, he sought to glorify the Creator of all things as it should be.

I'm certain you have your favorite readings and passages to soak in at times, and this is one of mine. There are many servants to look to from days gone by as well as the present. Daniel is a hero of faith that will stand the test of time as one of God's beloved. I want to be that kind of servant, don't you?

By Tony Ripley
From Expository Files 6.2; February 1999

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The Messiah and Jerusalem: The Amazing Prophecy of Daniel

Daniel 9:24-27

Jesus had died. He had been “cut off from the land of the living.” On the third day, He was raised back up to life. On the following forty days, He met with His apostles to help them in understanding how the events that they had witnessed had been prophesied and how that His rejection, death, burial and resurrection were a fulfillment of these ancient prophecies. There were over 300 prophecies written from 400 to 1,000 years previous to His coming. All of them were fulfilled.

One of the most remarkable (to me, at least) of these prophecies is one made by Daniel. "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:24-27).

The Historical Context

The nation of Judah had fallen away from God. Jeremiah had foretold that God would withhold His blessings and protection, and that Judah would be conquered and taken into captivity which would last for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10). This was later fulfilled when Babylon conquered Judah and took them into captivity, the first deportation according to history took place in 605 B.C. and the return in 535 B.C. Daniel himself was one of the young men taken into captivity and lived to see the return commence under Darius (Daniel 9:2).

70 years fulfilled a Divine pattern. The Law of Moses had commanded that every 7th year be a “sabbatical year.” This Law of God had been neglected for most of Israel's history, so the Lord decreed that they would spend one year in captivity for every sabbatical year they had failed to keep as a nation. They had missed 70 sabbatical years during their 490 years as a nation.

But also, this 490 year figure not only looked back into time, it also looked forward. The Messiah would come and “make atonement for iniquity” in 70 units of seven, referred to in the context as “weeks” but the word means a unit of seven. In this case, it would not be 7 days but 7 years (Daniel 9:24; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:20,21; Leviticus 25:3,4).

The time of Daniel's prophecy can be precisely pin pointed due to the mention of Darius beginning his reign (Daniel 9:1,2). This would make it 538 B.C. The angel Gabriel assures Daniel that not only will he see the return from captivity, but also gives much more far reaching information concerning the coming of the Messiah another five centuries in the future.

The Messiah and His Mission

The prophecy states forth the primary mission of the Messiah, and gives several particulars in addition to a very precise timing of the event:

1) **He would come and deal with the problem of sin. (9:24).** Note three different phrases used in the prophecy; “to finish the transgression”; “to make an end of sin”; “to make atonement for iniquity.” Jesus introduced a system by His own blood through which one can be washed from his sins and held accountable for them no longer as well as continue to be forgiven as one walks by faith and seeks forgiveness by repentance.

2) **He would bring in everlasting righteousness. (9:24).** Jesus enacted heaven's plan to make sinners righteous by grace through faith (Romans 1:16,17; 3:21-26).

3) **He would seal up the vision (9:24).** This means to bring to completion; to close or finish. With the coming of Jesus and His new covenant, Divine revelation was completed. With the generation who were alive during Jesus' life, we see the last living prophets and prophetesses. With those men and women and the messages given through them, prophecy would cease. (Hebrews 1:1,2; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

4) **He would anoint the Holy Place. (9:24).** Jesus is the Messiah (Hebrew), or Christ (Greek). Both of these words mean “anointed one.” When Jesus ascended into heaven, He entered the true, spiritual Holy Place where He lives and intercedes for us (Hebrews 9:11,12).

5) **He will make a firm covenant with many. (9:27).** His covenant is the New Testament, ratified by His death (Hebrews 8:6).

6) **He will bring OT sacrifices to an end. (9:27).** He did this by offering Himself as our only perfect sin offering, thus fulfilling the Law and taking that system out of the way. (Hebrews 7:18,19; 24,25).

The Prophetic Chronology

Daniel's prophecy itself indicates when it will be fulfilled. It tells us of the beginning point, the duration period, and the fulfilling event.

The beginning point (9:25). The edict to rebuild Jerusalem is where we begin the 490 year count down to the Messiah. There were actually three such edicts issued, so we'll have to figure out which one.

The duration period (9:24). 70 weeks. Again, the term "week" means "unit of seven" and could refer to seven days, weeks, months or years. Since the looking back covered 490 years, then it is reasonable to do the same looking forward.

The fulfilling event (9:26). This would be the 'cutting off of the Messiah.' This refers to His death. This will happen in the middle of the final "unit of seven" or 486 1/2 years in the future.

In 457 B.C. Ezra led a group back to rebuild Jerusalem by the King's edict (Ezra 7:6,7; 9:9). To this beginning point. Add the above 486 1/2 years and we come to 30 A.D. which is the date of the crucifixion! Following this, as punishment for putting the Messiah to death, Jerusalem would be destroyed. This, too, was accomplished by the Roman armies led by "the prince who is to come" (this would be Titus who would take his father's place as emperor) exactly as Daniel had said (cf. Matthew 24:15; 34). After a siege, Jerusalem was burned and the sanctuary was completely destroyed. But Jesus had already ascended back to heaven to serve in the new sanctuary. Our hope is in Him!

[Based on article by Wayne Jackson;
Reason & Revelation; 1997](#)

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 11.12; December 2004

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Hosea: The Broken Hearted Prophet

Minor Prophets Series #5

I doubt that any of the prophets felt the impact of Israel's faithlessness and apostasy from God any more than did Hosea. Probably none identified more closely with the sorrow God endures whenever His people turn their backs on Him and consort with idols. Out of all the prophets, Hosea was especially prepared to announce God's hurt over the people's disloyalty. God had prepared him. It was rough on Hosea. It was a job that somebody had to do. Because of following God's instructions, Hosea's heart would be broken and he would be publicly humiliated. He would suffer deeply, and in his emotional trauma illustrate to Israel what they were doing unto God. God went to great lengths to turn Israel around. If they won't listen to Hosea and wake up, then they are probably unreachable. God was exceedingly patient with His people.

And that's another point to Hosea. Not only had God been wrongfully and spitefully treated by His disloyal people, but He is also abundantly merciful and forgiving. They do not deserve it, but He is offering them opportunity to return. He will care for them again if they will return. It does not have to be over...yet. Consider then the message of Hosea and the way God prepared Hosea for his task.

BACKGROUND AND PREPARATION

"When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry, for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.' So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son." (HOSEA 1:2,3). Hosea prophesied about 750 B.C to the nation of Israel, the northern nation of the divided kingdom and the more faithless of the two. It was during the reign of Jeroboam II that Hosea was called by God to be a prophet. He foretold of the destruction of Israel and the captivity of the people. Jeroboam II was the last strong king of Israel. He is followed by a series of short reigning kings who had the habit of barely sitting down on the throne before they were assassinated by someone who wanted to be next in line.

The Lord gave Hosea some startling instructions that would have a profound effect on his life and the anguish of his heartfelt sorrow would expose of the treachery of the people's idolatry and wickedness. God commanded that Hosea marry a young lady with no moral or spiritual upbringing. Hosea wasn't to look for one of the few godly women left in the land, but one with little interest in serving God or being a good and loyal wife. Hosea searched and found such a wife in Gomer. He evidently found her to be very attractive and developed strong feelings for her. Hosea's training had begun.

THE POINT OF GOD'S COMMAND

"Contend with your mother...For their mother played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' (HOSEA 2:1;5). Gomer had rejected her husband's love and care and had chased after lovers who thrilled her and promised her things. She thought that they would supply her with all that Hosea had, and perhaps more. The fact is that they cared nothing for her, not really. All she had came from Hosea. He refused to continue to support her in her unfaithfulness. Soon she would be without anything and then perhaps realize her transgression.

The symbols are vivid: God was using Hosea's sorrow over his unfaithful wife as an illustration of His peoples' unfaithfulness to Him. It had been Jehovah who had blessed the people and rewarded them with security and increased their productivity and wealth. But they had turned their backs on Him and opted to serve idols who could do nothing for them. They attributed their past successes to the idols and not unto God. God, therefore, was going to withdraw His divine protection and blessing and Israel would be left empty. The Lord said, "For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and lavished upon her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore, I will take back my grain at harvest time..." (HOSEA 2:8,9).

Nations always suffer for their ungodly ways. Ours does too. How can we, today, as a nation expect to sing "God Bless America" and then be so obstinate and faithless, partaking in the very same kinds of things that Israel did? Without God's blessing, the good in our nation cannot last.

ISRAEL'S CORRUPTION

"And I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices to them...' For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery...My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner's wand informs them..." (HOSEA 2:13; 4:1-2; 12). The moral climate of Israel sounds much like our own today. Even in the texts we listed above there are five of the ten commandments which were being trodden underfoot on a regular basis. Sin had become the norm and nobody could trust anybody. There had grown a mutual disrespect, resentment and distrust of one another. All this would ultimately lead to desolation.

The evil started at the very top as well. The king of Israel ruled from the city of Samaria. The government itself had become so corrupt and self serving that a dark cloud hung over the land. "The iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, and the evil deeds of Samaria, for they deal falsely...And they do not consider it in their hearts that I remember all their evil deeds...with their wickedness they make the king glad..." HOSEA 7:1-3).

CONSEQUENCES OF APOSTASY

"My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge..." (HOSEA 4:6). Where will all this lead. Certainly the corrupt nation laughed off Hosea's warning. His efforts were no doubt the butt of the jester's jokes as performed his routine before the king and his court. Warnings of serious danger do no good if they go unheeded.

Various figures of speech are employed by Hosea to describe God's sorrowful anger and the coming judgment. "How long will they be incapable of innocence?...For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind" (HOSEA 8:5,7). It seems as if Israel should occasionally have a good day. But instead it is as though they are incapable of anything but the worst behavior. They seem bent on self destruction, sowing the wind that will one day produce the whirlwind that will take it all away.

In describing Assyria to the east as an "east wind", the prophet announces that it will invade Israel and will plunder the treasury of every precious article (HOSEA 13:15,16). The Lord asks, "It is your destruction, O Israel, That you are against Me, against your help. Where is now your king that he may save you in all your cities, and your judges of whom you requested...I gave you a king in My anger and took him away in My wrath." (HOSEA 13:9-11). The same could be said concerning our own godless politicians, judges and entertainers. They speak loudly now of things God despises, but where will they be when our cities disintegrate into complete ruin? Are we not also turning against our Help and will it not also result in our destruction to do so?

AS ALWAYS, THERE IS HOPE

"Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity." (HOSEA 14:1). Gomer finally returned to Hosea and he was instructed to take her back (HOSEA 3:1-5). This was an illustration of God's attitude toward those who would repent.

Also, as is the case with most of the prophets, there direct references to the coming Messiah and the blessing of all peoples through Him. God would one day make of faithful Jews and Gentiles a new, spiritual Israel. This was fulfilled in Christ and His church (ROMANS 9:25,26; I PETER 2:10). "...and it will come about that, in that place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.'" (HOSEA 1:10).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.5; May 1997

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

A Basic Need: Trust in and Knowledge of The Bible

Hosea 4:6

There is a basic need, today, in our land and among God's people as there were in the long ago, and shall ever be .. until the Lord comes again.

God caused His prophet Hosea to write long ago concerned His people Israel: "MY people are destroyed for the 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 forget thy children." (4:6)

The only safeguard against being led aside by the evil one and his army of deceivers is to, first have a complete trust in God's word, that it is accurate, complete, understandable, and practicable; secondly, to have knowledge of that message in one's mind.

So many subtle ways are devised and presented to keep one doubting that God's word is really THE WAY of knowing what God wants man to do. When one doubts that, then he/she is open to all kinds of gestures, appeals, etc., to look away and trust in other sources. Even if one feels that he/she really trust God's work implicitly to be all of God's message to modern man, if he/she can be keep in the dark as to what it says, then they are open to Satan's appeals and allurements.

Paul's concern for the Corinthians was along this line, that they would follow in Eve's footpath:

II Cor. 11:3 "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Knowing God's word is no guarantee that one will obey; but without knowledge, one can't possibly know what to do. But, if one has knowledge, and yet he doubts that it is absolutely accurate, giving the whole picture, then one is not going to be meticulous in applying the directions, either. God claims that His word is complete, accurate, and those who abide therein are safe while others are Not SAFE!

James 1:25 "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

He/she who declares that the word is impracticable, denies the above passage.

II John 1:9 "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."

He/she who denies the adequacy of the message is going against the above passage.

Beloved, I challenge you to search your heart daily to see if you really trust in the accuracy of God's word. If there is doubt, then study to the end that your faith in God's word to be what it claims to be is true.

Then whenever a problem arises, whatever it is, search the scriptures for all pertinent passages, when you gather them and get them in context, be honest in interpreting them and when you have the facts settled in your mind, **STAND** on them from now to eternity.

That isn't to say never consider what others say as to whether or not you are interpreting them correctly. That should always be done. Yet, **NOT** to think too highly of man (1 Cor. 4:6)

Listen, consider honestly, but as to the truth and reliability of the message, **STAND FIRM** continuously! God's word will stand the test (Prov. 30:5-6): "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

This is basic if we are to continue faithful until death (Rev. 2:10) The promise of eternal security is to them that are faithful until death and **DIE IN THE LORD** (Rev. 14:13)

By William Sexton
From Expository Files 9-4; April 2002

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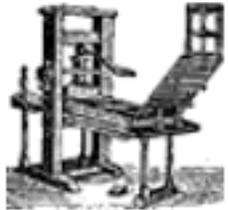
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

When Loyalty Fails

Hosea 6:1-4

The Prophet Hosea lived in a time similar to our own in many respects. Both Israel and Judah, the chosen people of God and descendants of Abraham, were experiencing prosperity and a general weakening of their moral and spiritual fabric. The reason for the prosperity was the weakening of Syria, their chief rival. The nation had been able to scale down its military and become more productive industrially and agriculturally. In our own nation, while the military has become more active recently, and there have been some economic downturns, we are still a prosperous nation. Hosea lived during such a prosperous time. It seems what is good for the pocketbook is not always good for the soul, though it need not be that way. (contrast Matthew 19:24-26; 1 Timothy 6:9,10; Revelation 3:15-19 with 3 John 1,2; 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

The prophet Hosea lived in the eighth century before Christ. People were demanding more luxuries, and it seemed that the more they got, the more they wanted. They had begun borrowing the religious practices of other nations (the worship of Baal and other idols). They searched for a more sensual and less spiritual religion. Those faithful to God became a smaller and smaller minority, often ridiculed for their faith and narrow-mindedness. Even then, the Lord patiently called them to repent and return to Him. While there may have been scattered success with individuals, the nation as a whole rejected the invitation and history shows a continued downward spiral to its ruin and destruction. Such could have been averted. History has a lot to teach our own nation if we'll listen. Notice the invitation issued by the Lord to the nation through Hosea: "Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, That we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; And He will come to us like the rain, Like the spring rain watering the earth." (Hosea 6:1-3). Why did this invitation fall on deaf ears? The next verse tells us; in a word; disloyalty. "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud And like the dew which goes away early." (Hosea 6:4).

Torn and Wounded (vs. 1)

The People had left God. It had happened gradually over a period of years. Now, God had withdrawn His special providential care from the nation. All the world is blessed in some ways. Whether we are righteous or faithful, we will enjoy a degree of blessings. The sun shines and the rain falls on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17). But God had promised special blessings to His people if they remained faithful (Deuteronomy 11:13-17). Likewise today, there are special blessings reserved only for the faithful (Ephesians 1:3; Hebrews 5:9; James 1:25; 5:16).

That nation suffered many of the same consequences as our own; most were well off materially, but were suffering in other ways. There was less confidence and good feelings about the future. Love, honor and nobility were becoming forgotten virtues. Their shallow spirituality was taking its toll on the soul of the nation. Greed, despair and fear ruled the day. The law of the jungle was replacing the Law of God (see Hosea's description of this in 5:9-13).

The answer to our dilemma today is the same as theirs; verse 1: "Let us return to the Lord."

Like a Morning Cloud (vs. 4)

This is a rather interesting figure to use to describe the loyalty of Israel to God. Like a farmer who sees a "morning cloud" and his hope for rain for his thirsty crops rises. But as the day continues, the sun grows stronger and as the dew evaporates, so does the cloud. The hopeful prospect vanishes away. The loyalty of Israel was like that cloud. Our nation's loyalty to God today and righteous principles, it seems, are no less fleeting. The parallel strikes even closer when we look at many in the church today. Their loyalty to God is "like a morning cloud"; faith shallow; priorities misplaced and zeal non-existent. There is a quickness to compromise with the world while going through minimal motions of Christianity, but hearts are far from God (Matthew 7:19-24; 15:8,9; James 1:4; 6-8).

The end result is ruin. We cannot neglect our duty nor abandon the One who died for us without bringing ourselves down. The answer, again, is found in verse 1: "Let us return to the Lord."

Revival and Life (vs. 2)

This passage reminds us of another event that was still 800 years in the future. The resurrection of Jesus is not what Hosea is talking about. But God had already foreordained that His Son would die and arise on the third day, and inspired Hosea to use this language in describing a spiritual renewal that was needed by the people of his day. "He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, That we may live before Him."

Many such hints in the O.T. prophecies and figures which people of faith would not connect to Jesus until the gospel age (i.e. brass serpent in wilderness; Jonah in the belly of the fish for three days). Now, when we read such, we are caused to be reminded of Christ Jesus, our hope. The sin of such disloyalty and neglect must be repented of to be cured. To ignore it is to suffer defeat (Ephesians 2:1-5; James 4:8-10). The answer: verse 1 "Let us return to the Lord."

Know the Lord (vs. 3)

Earlier, there was a statement made about the disastrous effect of a lack of knowledge: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6). This seems to indicate a willful ignorance; a refusal to listen; a blindness of choice. The people had chosen to reject God. (Matthew 13:14-15); But it doesn't have to be this way (Matthew 13:16) What made the difference? (Matthew 13:18-23). As long as one is ignorant, he can mock God's laws and think himself clever in spite of the moral decline seen all around him. Hosea was mocked and ridiculed for his message, and so will we be if we are true to our

responsibility to try and help others see the light. But listen! If the Lord's standards were more respected and obeyed today, many of our problems would vanish away! How long will we, as a nation, continue to "reject knowledge"? Much better to "press on to know the Lord" (1 John 2:4-6).

We cannot do anything about Israel. They are now a part of history. We can do a little about our own nation; to the extent of our influence if we live by faith. A drop in the bucket, but a much needed drop without which the bucket won't get filled. This is where you have control. Don't let your loyalty be like a morning cloud. The answer is, as always, return to the Lord.

By Jon W. Quinn
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Mercy

Hosea 6:6

As we go about the business of serving God, there are many distractions along the way. We go to church, we sing, we pray, we listen to the sermon or class, we take the Lord's Supper, and we suppose we have done our duty. We have done "God's will in God's way". But, because of the repetitive nature of these acts, we sometimes go through the motions without any participation of the mind and heart. In Hosea 6, the prophet complains that Israel had done this. They thought that, if they offered the prescribed sacrifices, they could devote their affections to themselves and even to idol gods.

For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6 NKJV).

The Hebrew word for "mercy" in this passage is a hugely important term in the Old Testament, something like "agape" in the N.T. The word is "hesed" (H2617). It is used 248 times in the O.T. In the KJV, it is translated "mercy" 149 times, "kindness" 40 times, and "loving kindness" 30 times. It is translated by other similar words 27 times.

Thus, in our passage, the word expresses a tender affection that should be directed to God. In Matt. 9:13, the Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. He reminded them of this passage in Hosea. They were offering sacrifices. They practiced their religion with incredible fastidiousness, but they didn't love God. And they had no tender compassion for their fellow man. Their religion was defined by pickiness and faultfinding.

"I desire" - The whole idea of religious activity is to give God what He desires.

"Mercy" - "Hesed" may include loving kindness, loyalty and holiness. In the Maccabean period, the righteous were called the "Hasidim", "godly", "devout".

"Not sacrifice" - Of course, God did want sacrifice. He instituted sacrifice at the dawn of creation. From Adam to Christ, He required animal sacrifice. This is one of those "not/but" statements in which one thing is negated in order that something else may be emphasized. He desired sacrifice, but He desired hesed, "loving kindness", even more. Note the last line: "...more than burnt offerings".

"The knowledge of God" - "Knowledge" can mean accumulated facts. But, in the Bible, it often means

more. It refers to an intimate personal relationship. It is good to know a lot about God. Many atheists know about God. But they have no personal relationship with Him. They have no love for Him. God desires that we walk with Him in close personal fellowship.

So, we need to avoid this robotic execution of religious deeds and words. Whatever we do for God, it is important to remember that worship offered without thought and feeling is empty, futile and unacceptable.

By Jay Bowman
From Expository Files 13.11; November 2006

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"Fired Up"

Hosea 7:4-8

People often seek for passion in life. Conversation is often dominated by the one who is the most heated in affirmation or defense of their positions. We are very often drawn to those who are compelling and seek such intensity for ourselves. Both in religion and out, people want to be zealous for something or sometimes anything, but this search for something to be zealous about can lead them astray.

Hos. 7:4-7 "They are all adulterers Like an oven heated by the baker, Who ceases to stir up the fire From the kneading of the dough until it is leavened. On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine; He stretched out his hand with scoffers, For their hearts are like an oven As they approach their plotting; Their anger smolders all night, In the morning it burns like a flaming fire. All of them are hot like an oven, And they consume their rulers; All their kings have fallen. None of them calls on Me. Ephraim mixes himself with the nations; Ephraim has become a cake not turned."

Hosea described those zealous for evil. Their hearts were very passionate toward their idolatries. They are as heated up and excited about these things as can be. They are compared to bread in a baker's oven. They are burning to be involved. But what are they involved in? They are engrossed in anger, plotting, and consuming desires that destroy. It isn't enough to be enthusiastic, you have to be enthused about the right things.

Notice three parts of Hosea's indictment: 1.) The used artificial devices to keep their passions up. (vs. 5) Hosea speaks of those who fire themselves up with wine. There are all kinds of chemicals that will change your thinking. They will get you "high" - but they will destroy your life. If the pure rush of excitement is all you care about then go for it - that's the quickest way. Some say, "Oh preacher, you're not serious!" Yes I am - if you want to just live for the excitement of the flesh that is the quickest way -- and yes, I know it's destructive, so is all living for the flesh -- some ways just are more direct about it than others. OK, so you're not going to fire yourself up with drugs. How about alcohol? What's the difference except degree?

Next, what about other things that fire people up through other fleshly inducements? Many appeal to the flesh to build up churches. I recall one congregation (supposedly of the Lord's people) that had a massive advertising campaign that ended every spot with the tag line "the exciting _____ Church of Christ." I guess that meant to imply that others weren't, or at least that they were more so. But most of what they advertised as "exciting" wasn't things you can read about in your Bible. I guess Bible study, psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and prayer weren't enough to keep the attention of those that they

wanted to attract, so they had more fleshly and social inducements to draw their crowd.

This is not new. Hosea spoke of those who engaged in idolatry. Balaam taught God's people from the very beginning a form of worship that they could get really fired up about - acts of fornication. (Rev. 2:14) I don't see any going so far as to offer that to get people fired up about church today. But why not? Well everyone knows it's just plain wrong. But what about other things not authorized in the scripture? Aren't they just plain wrong too? All the appeals of the social gospel, counseling instead of preaching, soft peddling the gospel requirements of repentance and holiness, aren't all these just plain wrong too? They are, but these take the wind out of many people's sails, so they aren't preached on. Convicting of sins and exhorting to a holy life dampens the party, so we many won't have it. That just leaves us with the doctrine of "nice" and the gospel of "excitement." People want to be a part of what's "happening" - they want to be where things are "running and gunning," and "a goin' and a blowing." But the old fashion gospel is a hindrance to people's "pep-rally" religion and "feel-good" desires.

Hosea says that 2.) They consumed others in their excited state. (vs. 7) Here were people that plotted against, mulled over, and then burst out like flames against their rulers. They nursed their grudges until their anger overcame their fear of acting (vs. 6). It's a dangerous thing to be too hot for too long. Paul said, "let not the sun go down upon your wrath," (Eph. 4:26) but they thought about these things night after night. As Mary "treasured in her heart" all the wonderful things about Jesus, they make a special place to ponder about all the wrongs done them - until they could take revenge. What teaches me to let go of anger and forgive? The word of God. But if I ignore the word of God about temperance and self control so that I'm always fired up and never thoughtful about my real need before God, why won't I just ignore the word of God about anger too?

That's the problem about being led by emotion -- if I let it lead in one area (say worship), then why aren't my emotions good enough to lead me in other areas, all areas, of life? So if my emotions guide my relationship with God why won't they soon guide my relationships with men? They will every time. And, since men may do me harm or become my enemies, I'm sure I'll come up with a ready emotional response to deal with them in my own way. Those of Hosea's day murdered their kings. Some in the apostles John's day hated their brethren. I'm sure my emotions will lead to some equal evil if I let them. Only God's word will hold me back from such evil, but if I chunk it for doing what I want in other things, why not in this area as well?

Hosea concluded that 3.) They ended up half baked. (vs. 8) They were "a cake not turned." They were raw on one side and burned on the other. If you want an unbalanced life, just follow your emotions, or the emotional leadings of others all the time. Life is not just "ups." Read Eccl. 3 to see there is a time and place for all parts of life. There is both weeping and rejoicing, joy and gladness, and repentance and lamenting. The one who learns the whole council of God sees how He directs both sides of life to be a mature and well-rounded Christian.

No, that's not as thrilling and exciting as some say life should be and as the "rah-rah" religionists teach. But this is the life that God instructs us to have. We are to go through the hard process of self examination - to find and root out sin as spelled out in God's word.

In vs. 7 God lamented, "None of them calls on Me." Those who get to fired up about their own feelings and desires and wants don't care to much about God. You can put God first, or you can put yourself first. You can fire up your faith or your lusts. It all depends on where you put your emphasis.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 8.1; January 2001

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Rejecting the Good

Hosea 8:1-3

"Set the trumpet to your mouth! He shall come like an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law. Israel will cry to Me, 'My God, we know You!' Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him." -Hosea 8:1-3

Hosea lived in the tragic final days of the northern kingdom of Israel, during which six kings (following Jeroboam II) reigned within 25 years. Four of those kings were murdered by their successors while in office; one king, Hoshea, was captured in battle. Only one king: Menahem, was succeeded on the throne by his son. These kings floated away "like a twig on the surface of the waters" (Hosea 10:7). Bloodshed followed bloodshed, and threats from the Assyrian enemies grew more and more violent.

But if the political and physical condition of the northern kingdom was in poor condition, the spiritual condition of God's people was far worse! Hosea saw, as the word of the Lord had declared, that Israel's basic problem was their failure to acknowledge God.

God's relation to Israel was that of love. The intimacy of the covenant relationship between God and Israel; illustrated in the first part of this book by the husband-wife relationship, is later amplified by the father-child relationship. Yet with all the love that God had displayed to His people, they grew disloyal and wound up committing spiritual adultery.

As Hosea had said, "Israel had "rejected the good" (v.3). In this text, the Hebrew word for "good" has reference to the influence of God in the lives of His people. It has reference to the idea of God's will over them; the idea that God would be directing and guiding them.

Israel had cast off this goodness because they refused to have a true knowledge of God in their mind any more. Earlier in this book, as Hosea was speaking concerning why it is that the people of God were going to be destroyed, he wrote, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6).

How does Hosea's world compare to our world? Unfortunately, the people of today continue to "cast off the good." Just like Israel, many will reject the influence of God; they don't want to know God.

In the Roman letter, the apostle Paul often speaks about His obligation to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is a very important reason why Paul has this obligation. It is because the Gospel of

Christ is the only power that can save anyone. It is the only way that anyone can now come to know God – that is, through the good news of His son. The Scriptures make it abundantly clear: there is not any way to save a man, except by teaching him the truth. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Make you free from what? If you study the context of that passage, Jesus is saying that His truth will set you free from serving sin. His truth provides the way to save your soul!

We hear Paul saying in Romans 1:17, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," Why? What was the reason why he was not ashamed of it? As he declared, because "it is God's power to save everyone who believes it." It is the power of God to save, because, in the gospel, God's way is made known for making men just, holy, and righteous. The intent and purpose – the very purpose of it being revealed – is in order to produce saving faith in the heart of the individual! In John 20:31, John said, "These things are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you might have life through his name."

Do people begin to sow the wind today by rejecting the knowledge of God? Do they cast off the good by rejecting His word; what He has revealed about Himself and Man? ABSOLUTELY! People continually reject the true knowledge of God!

The questions you must ask yourself are: "Do I cast off the good? Am I rejecting God's influence? Am I ashamed of the gospel of Christ?"

If you have not obeyed His gospel, and if you are not abiding in His word, then you have "rejected the good." You are "sowing the wind," and if you do not turn to God in obedience to His will, you will "reap the whirlwind." (Hosea 8:7)

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." -Galatians 6:7-8

By John Hagenbuch
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"They Sow the Wind, and Reap the Whirlwind"

Hosea 8:1-14

There have been times that I have struggled with things the Bible taught. For example, I once wondered if people could really be as fickle as the Bible portrayed ancient Israel and Judah as being. Bible history records that these people were blessed abundantly by God in every way. But they apostatized. They turned their backs on God and His Law which had been the source of their stability, security and prosperity. They became exceedingly corrupt and suffered horribly for it. God sent prophets to them to call them back to the right track, assuring them renewal and deliverance if they would repent, but the Bible relates how they said "no" to these offers, even to the point of persecuting and slaying the prophets sent to them. I wondered about that. I wondered how anybody could reject such an offer. Wouldn't any reasonable person jump at such an opportunity to be rid of the hardships caused by their own degradation so they could begin anew? People do not really behave that way, do they? Wouldn't they seek to rescue their society and culture from the moral and spiritual cesspool they had created? Wouldn't they do so for their children? Would they react so hatefully toward their only hope? It was hard for me to believe that people could be so callused and stubborn that they would continue to follow such a destructive path seeing all the hardship it was causing. It was difficult to accept but it isn't anymore. Why? Because I see it happening so clearly in my own country today. The sad truth is that yes, people are exactly that way.

BACKGROUND TO HOSEA'S PROPHECY

"Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land." (HOSEA 4:1) Hosea prophesied from 750-725 B.C. in Israel. The nation was now several generations into its religious apostasy. Everything was getting worse across the nation. No one was still alive who could remember the glory of the faithful nation during the reigns of David and Solomon. The stirring principles of justice and righteousness upon which their nation had been founded had also been forgotten. In their religion, they sometimes continued to pay verbal homage unto Jehovah, but had mixed in plenty of paganism, including calf-worship and the worship of Baal. It had become a carnal affair designed to appeal to sensual appetites. It would continue to degrade until in not the too distant future that they would even resort to sacrificing their own children on the altars of pagan deities.

The moral climate had also plummeted. Mentioned in the prophecy is such conduct as swearing, breaking faith, murder, stealing, adultery, deceit, drunkenness and dishonesty in business. The political climate was no better than the moral and religious climates. Kings seldom ascended the throne by

peaceful means. There was corruption and greed, treachery and murder. While there might be some differences between our condition today and theirs then, the similarities are striking!

HOSEA'S WARNING

Consider the following excerpts from the eighth chapter of Hosea. Any similarity between these people and us today is purely intentional.

Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant, and rebelled against My law. They cry out to Me, "My God, we of Israel know Thee!" Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by Me; They have appointed princes, but I did not know it. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves... how long will they be incapable of innocence? ...For they sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind... Since Ephraim has multiplied altars for sin, they have become altars of sinning for him. Though I wrote for him ten thousand precepts of My law, they are regarded as a strange thing. As for My sacrificial gifts, they sacrifice the flesh and eat it, but the Lord has taken no delight in them. Now He will remember their iniquity, and punish them for their sins; they will return to Egypt. For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities, but I will send a fire upon its cities that it may consume its palatial dwellings. (HOSEA 8:1-14).

FRIGHTENING PARALLELS

"It is your destruction, O Israel, that you are against Me, against your help." (HOSEA 13:9)

Everyone recognizes the problems we face in our nation. Few, if any, argue that things are getting better. There is a solution to our dilemma, just as there was for Israel's. But Israel rejected the true solution in favor of quick and easy fixes which were no fixes at all. They mocked and ridiculed the solution and were destroyed for it.

"Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the Lord."

How quickly control was lost. Though the apostasy was slow, little by little over several generations, the leaders insisted that everything was O.K. The false prophets were proclaiming "peace, peace" when there was no peace. The damage to the moral and spiritual fiber of the nation continued to accumulate until the collapse came, sudden and quick. In our own situation, it seems as if the digression is quickening as more and more of our institutions are losing control.

"My God, we of Israel know Thee."

Today, the majority of Americans claim to believe in God. But it is an empty claim if one is not willing to obey God. One who will lie, cheat or steal and then proudly boast of his belief in God is only deceiving himself. The same polls in which the majority say they believe in God will also show that the majority do not respect His word as they should. If they did, then the Scriptures would settle moral and doctrinal issues for them, but as it is, many more people are willing to say they believe in God than are willing to live their lives according to the Scriptures.

"With their silver and gold they made idols for themselves."

We are little different from them. They made idols out of silver and gold while we have made silver and gold our idol. Materialism is a horrible, demeaning affliction. Any society where things become more important than people and a person's success is measured more by his possessions than his relationships with others is clearly on the wrong path.

"They sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind."

We can never really escape the consequences of our actions. Think about how much of the hardship and suffering that exists today is a direct result of sinful behavior! The cry goes out for compassion, but when one responds compassionately by advising a return to the moral standards and principles as taught in the Word of God he is soundly renounced. We, as a nation, have sown the wind. We are now beginning to reap the whirlwind.

"Though I wrote him ten thousand precepts of My law, they regard it as a strange thing."

Isn't that how people regard God's law today in our own nation? As a strange thing? Of course it is. And those who try to live by it are strange people. People say they long for the day when they could feel safe walking down the street, when they could keep their doors unlocked, when people were more honest and helpful and still felt a sense of brotherhood, when schools were safe for our children, when drugs were almost unheard of, and when there was a prevailing sense that things were good and getting better. But that was back when the word of God was not regarded as a strange thing. Why cannot people see that there is an obvious connection?

"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them, But transgressors will stumble in them." (Hosea 14:9).

By Jon W. Quinn
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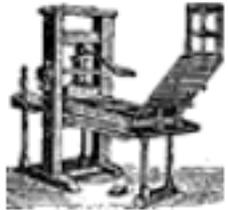
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The Message of Joel

Minor Prophets Series (#3)

In the last several years we have seen a much destruction in our nation. The big headlines have been the L.A. riots, hurricane Andrew and devastating floods. Another force which is at work as well to undermined our peace and security is crime; which includes the drug trade, gang warfare and general disrespect for law. Moral principles which once guided our nation are being cast aside and I fear our nation is suffering the consequences.

Of course, not all is bad. There are still bright spots. Along with the looters and hucksters that appear at disasters are the givers which lend aid. There are still those who choose to live by a higher standard, and for this we are thankful. But still, generally the drift is away from these standards and principles.

Are these events God's wake up call to our nation? Are they His way of getting our attention? Will worse things follow if our nation does not heed the warning? Any answer I give, yes or no, would be speculation because I am not a prophet but only a preacher. I do not receive direct, special revelations from God, I simply teach Scriptures as is according to God's plan (II TIMOTHY 2:15; 3:16,17; 4:1-5). However, I see from the Scriptures how God has dealt with nations of the past undergoing similar moral and spiritual digressions. For example, the prophet Joel took God's announcement of His judgment upon the nation of Judah during that nation's drift. It is easy to see some parallels.

The Initial Judgment

"The word of the Lord that came to the prophet Joel...Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days?...What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten...The field is ruined, the land mourns, for the grain is ruined...The seeds shrivel up under the clods; the storehouses are desolate..." (JOEL 1:1-2;4- ;10;17). The people of Joel's days had never seen such natural devastation. First, the crops were wiped out by waves of locusts sweeping the land. Also drought accompanied the locusts (1:12) and fires raged out of control (1:19). The cattle and sheep had no pasture (1:18) and the brooks dried up (1:20).

Joel was sent by God to announce the reason behind these calamities. Centuries before the Lord had told the people through Moses what would be the consequences if they broke their faith and turned away from God (DEUTERONOMY 28:21;23;38). The Lord's patience had run out and the people of Joel's day were seeing the beginnings of Divine judgment.

The Causes of Judgment

"Now it shall be that if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth...But if it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you." (DEUTERONOMY 28:1;15). The people had ceased allowing God to be their light. There were still religious people in the land. Many had returned to paganism and the worship of nature and graven images. Others continued a warped form of Judaism which was not at all pleasing to God. And some had just become so occupied with luxury and leisure that they had little time for any religion at all. Unlike previous generations where the majority were interested and committed in their faith, the faithful of Joel's day were in the small minority. The nation had been blessed by God. Now, according to Joel, He was withdrawing the good He had done for them. I certainly do not need to spell out the parallels with our own day; to do so would be to state the obvious.

A Call to Repentance

"'Yet even now,' declares the Lord, 'Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.' Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil." (JOEL 2:12-13). Even now it was not too late for Judah. It was not a time for lip service or crocodile tears. Empty ritual was not enough. It was time for a genuine return unto God. "Return to Me with all your heart...rend your heart and not your garments." The rending of a garment was done to show sorrow or repentance. But doing so just for symbolism is not enough. Symbols do not mean much if genuine actions do not follow. Likewise today: what good does it do to sing God Bless America or print In God we trust on our coins if we are intent on rejecting His moral and spiritual counsel? Symbols are important only if they truly show what is on the heart.

Also, it is important to note that God is always quick to forgive and bless. He does not delight in our failures. He urges repentance, but at the same time He will not force it. If a nation decides it can do better without God, He will abide by their decision. But a nation cannot do better without God's help. In our own nation, the further we drift from God the worse things seem to get.

Final Warning

"They have cast lots for My people, traded a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine that they may drink. Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you rendering Me a recompense? But if you do recompense Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head...put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread for the winepress is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness." (JOEL 3:3- 4;13-15). This warning is to those who had persecuted God's people. They had cast lots for them and sold them into slavery. They had ridiculed them, their faith, their manner of life and their God. The Lord pictures their evil as filling up a winepress and is now beginning to overflow. He announces that He has reached a decision, or verdict. His patience is extinguished and the sickle of

His judgment is in His hand. The sun, moon and stars growing dark symbolize the hopelessness of those who had lived so wickedly.

Today it also seems as if those who try to live faithfully before God are mocked and ridiculed. While laws are being passed to protect the "rights" of those who would speak evil of Christians, other laws are also being passed prohibiting Christians from speaking of the things important to them. The vats of wickedness had overflowed in Judah's day bringing God's judgment. How close to full are those vats today?

A Message of Hope to the Faithful

"And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will see dream dreams, your young men will see visions...And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those that escape, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls." (JOEL 2:28-32). Joel was not only a prophet of doom, but also of hope. He blends in the promises made to the faithful of Joel's day with Messianic promises to be fulfilled in Christ. Indeed, we find the fulfillment of the above verses centuries later when the apostles stood in Jerusalem and first proclaimed salvation in the name of the newly resurrected Lord Jesus. The age of the gospel had dawned and the Lord began saving the remnant. Peter announced that Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled (ACTS 2:16-21) and when the people asked what they must do in calling upon the name of the Lord they were told: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (ACTS 2:38). Our hope lies in Christ Jesus. God's spiritual and eternal blessings are only to be found in Him. Nations come and go, but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.3; March 1997

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Survey of Joel

Joel 1:1-3:21

"The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel," Joel 1:1

I would love to know more about men like Joel. Hitchcock's Bible Names says "Pethuel" means persuasion of God. According to another scholar it signified, "the openheartedness or sincerity of God," (Keil). Does that supply some hint about his family background? Joel's name means Jehovah is God. Perhaps some conclusions can be gathered from his message, especially regarding his conviction and courage. We will have to be satisfied with our ignorance or speculation about such matters. Likewise, as one commentator said: "The date of the book is as conjectural as the life of the man himself," (A Commentary On The Minor Prophets, Homer Hailey, p.#40).

This should not hinder our efforts to read and understand the book of Joel. The following facts are easily discerned from your first reading of the book:

1. The prophet directed the "word of the Lord" to the "elders," (1:2a). References to Zion and Judah in the book would suggest Joel spoke to the leaders in Judah, the southern kingdom.
2. Joel speaks of a calamity unlike anything before (1:2b).
3. The prophet instructed them to transmit the message to future generations (1:3).
4. Joel spoke of a coming judgment as "the day of the Lord," and it was "at hand," (2:1). This "alarm" was to be sounded "in Zion."
5. Judah would be invaded by "a people ... great and strong," (2:2).
6. The response God instructed through Joel was: "Turn to Me with all your heart," (2:12).
7. Looking to the future, God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (2:28ff). For the fulfillment of this prophecy, observe what the apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost: "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel," (Acts 2:16ff).
8. In chapter three, God says He would "bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem," and deal with "all nations," for "their wickedness," (3:1,13).

A clear literary pattern emerges in Joel chapter one. Observing this as you read the chapter can be of great help in studying the book of Joel. Joel describes calamity. Alongside his description, he tells the people what their response should be. Notice:

Calamity: "Has anything happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?" (Verse 2).
Response: "Tell your children about it...," etc. (Verse 3). See Psa. 78:5,6.

Calamity: Consuming locusts (Verse 4).
Response: "Awake," (Verse 5).

Calamity: "...a nation has come up against My land," (Verse 6).
Response: "Lament...," (Verse 8).

Calamity: "The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord...," etc. (Verses 9,10).
Response: "Be ashamed...," (Verse 11).

Calamity: "The vine has dried up, and the fig tree withered ... surely joy has withered away from the sons of men," (Verse 12).
Response: "Gird yourselves and lament ... consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders...," (Verses 13,14).

Calamity: "The day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty...," (Verses 15-18).
Response: "O Lord, to You I cry out...," (Verses 19,20).

Joel is describing calamity, telling of judgment against the people. The prophet wants the people of Judah and Jerusalem to know, God is saying something in these events! Like other men of God, Joel was warning the people to see in their calamity (past, present, future) the hand of God. These events - as described or interpreted by Joel - should have caused the people to return to the Lord, who "relents from doing harm," (2:13).

What are we to do with this teaching from Joel today?

(1) We learn of the stubborn wickedness of men. Even after men begin to suffer the results of their own selfish ways, they often show no signs of repentance (see Isa. 1:5-9). The blight brought upon us by sin should awaken us to repent, especially when we understand the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4).

(2) We ought to take to heart the patience of the Lord, who "is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm," (2:13). It was not too late, for the people Joel spoke to, to realize and respond to God's mercy, rendering their hearts and turning to the Lord.

(3) The outpouring of the Spirit Joel spoke of has a very specific fulfillment beginning on

the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff). "It is evident from Acts 2 that only the apostles received the outpouring of the Spirit on that occasion; and yet Peter quoted the passage from Joel, declaring 'This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel' (Acts 2:16). Later we find the gospel being carried to the Gentiles. The outpouring of the Spirit upon Cornelius and those gathered in his house (Acts 10) confirms the Gentiles' acceptance of the gospel and the Lord's acceptance of them. Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9), and Paul tells of women who prophesied (1 Cor. 11:5). This receiving of the Spirit would be without distinction of age - 'old men and young men,' without distinction of sex - 'sons and daughters,' and without distinction of social order - 'servants and handmaids'." (A Commentary On The Minor Prophets, Homer Hailey, p.#54). We who are God's people today are recipients of the blessings Joel prophesied. We are God's spiritual remnant "according to the election of grace," (Rom. 11:5).

While we do not have Joel's among us today (inspired prophets), all of the events we experience and witness on earth should work within us swift repentance. God is in control. As time passes we should take seriously what the Lord said through Joel: "Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame," (Joel 2:27). "Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion, a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame,' (1 Pet. 2:6).

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 12.5; May 2005

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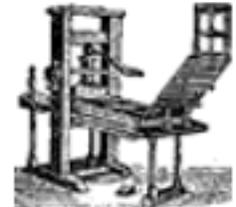


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He's Holding out for Us

Joel 2:12-13

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil." Joel 2:12-13

The message of Joel is intriguing. Chapter one tells the reader that the nation of Judah had just been ravaged by a phenomenal locust plague. The infestation was unusually severe, one so bad that no one living at the time could remember anything worse, 1:3. Conditions were so bad that the destruction affected all facets of society. The country was truly suffering. Joel enters the scene warning the people that a day of greater judgment and punishment was coming if they failed to repent. The implication is that the locust plague mentioned in chapter one was sent by God in an effort to wake up the people from spiritual slumber. They had grown apart from God and forgotten their dependence on Him. And, it was at their lowest, most vulnerable moment that God stood by with His hand outstretched, hoping for their repentance. The words of 2:12-13 are touching and reveal important things concerning genuine repentance and the nature of God. For example...

Verse twelve teaches us that those who truly repent move with a sense of urgency. "Yet even now," declares the Lord... When we realize the reality of the punishment that will come with a failure to act and the possibility that God could deal out retribution at any moment, there will be little delay in moving toward God. A person who truly repents will realize that time is precious and one moment spent outside a relationship with God is just one moment too long.

Verse twelve teaches us that true repentance involves a desire to return to God. God said, "Return to me with all your heart..." Generations before, the children of Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God. Through the worship of idols, trust in human alliances, and turning their back on God, they had not lived up to their side of the agreement. God is calling them to return. Like the children of Israel, Christians have made a covenant with God. We can violate that covenant thus destroying the connection with God because of our sinful behavior. But yet, God always calls us back so that the relationship can be fully restored to its former quality. If you have rejected the covenant you once made with God, won't you come back? God is holding out for your repentance. See Luke 15:11-32.

Verse twelve teaches us that true repentance comes from the heart. Rend your heart and not your garments. True repentance goes farther than fear of punishment and the confession of sin. God wants our heart. True repentance involves a complete and total change in one's life. It is an inward change of the heart and while it begins in our mind, it is seen outwardly in our actions. Going along with this...

Verse twelve teaches us that true repentance will be seen in our actions. Fasting, weeping, and mourning are all evidence of true, genuine repentance. However, these things do not profit the person who has not changed his will. In Joel 2:15, Judah was called upon to change their will and demonstrate a national assembly where each person called on the name of the Lord. This involved people from the oldest to the youngest in society. Each person needed to refocus their mind on their extreme dependence upon God. So must we. We need to communicate to God that we are sorrowful for our own sin and realize our dependence upon Him. Fruits of repentance will be seen when our motives are genuine and true. See Matthew 3:8.

Verse thirteen tells us how great and awesome the God is that we serve. When we consider His graciousness, compassion, how He is slow to anger, how He abounds in lovingkindness, and will relent of evil, it should move us to humbly serve Him. Praise God that He is not a vengeful, unloving God who looks forward to dealing out retribution! He holds out for us, desiring a personal, caring relationship with each one of us. We are truly special to Him. Oh how He loves us, just as a father does his child. We are His children! How close is your relationship with God? Do you need to return to Him? He is holding out for you to come back!

By Matt Allen
From Expository Files 13.8; August 2006

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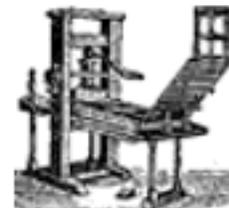


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Burden of Amos

Special Series: Minor Prophets (#4)

I doubt that Amos ever thought God might call him to be a prophet. He was a simple shepherd who lived about 750 B.C. in the village of Tekoa which was about six miles south of Bethlehem. This was during the days of the divided kingdom, when there was Israel to the north and Judah in the south. It was not an easy message that God gave to Amos. Israel and Judah had prospered, and with their new found luxuries came abandonment of God and the mistreatment of the poor by the rich. Also, the moral climate of the nation had degraded and political corruption was rampant. Finally, there was also religious corruption. Religious sentiment seemed to have been high, but not true devotion to the Living God. And so Amos is sent to announce God's judgment upon the nation. It is important to note that Amos was neither the first nor the last of a series of prophets that were sent to God's people with a similar message. God's judgment came in steps carefully calculated to induce repentance. God was very patient, taking over three centuries and sending a series of judgments up unto the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah.

There are some important lessons to learn in the prophets and their messages to a nation that was much like our own is today. Will we learn from Israel's mistakes? Or will we travel as a nation the same path away from God and His blessings?

Judgment and the Neighboring Nations

"The Lord roars from Zion, and from Jerusalem He utters His voice." (AMOS 1:2). Before turning his attention to the chosen of Israel, Amos is directed to sound forth the coming of God's judgment upon six heathen nations. The subject nations were: "Damascus" (Syria), "Gaza" (Philistines), Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab. The reasons for God's anger vary, but include attacks upon Israel and horrible atrocities that followed, the breaking of covenants and betrayal of Israel, and various acts of cruelty, immorality and ungodliness.

Though God had given His written law and ten commandments only unto Israel, that did not relieve the other nations of their obligations to live moral lives. They were still responsible for their crimes and sin. While they were not accountable unto the Mosaic law given to Israel, they were accountable to God's universal moral standards including the responsibility to honor God as God (ROMANS 1:18-32; 2:14-16).

The Special Privilege and Responsibility of Israel

"And it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and I led you in the wilderness forty years... Then I raised some of your sons to be prophets and some of your young men to be Nazarites. 'Is this not so, O sons of Israel?' declares the Lord... You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (AMOS 2:10,11; 3:2). At one time Israel and God had walked together, but that is no longer possible in Amos' day "Can two men walk together unless they made an agreement?" (AMOS 3:3). The Lord and Israel are at odds now. The friendship has been broken because one of the friends has turned his back on the other. But without the friendship, the benefits are also gone. Israel has forsaken his best friend and is left without help.

It is easy for us to decry the evil we see in the world around us, just as I am sure it was easy for Israel to speak with disgust about the horrible things done in their neighbors' lands. But in doing so, we might be making the same mistake. So intent on seeing the evil in others we might forget our own shortcomings and be overcome by them. Simple neglect might not appear as bad as murder, but if it causes me to lose my relationship with God then in the end I am no better off. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (I PETER 4:17). Judgment will begin with the Lord's people. I fear that many of us will be unprepared thinking that as long as our lives are in somewhat better shape than the world that we will escape judgment for neglect, or selfishness, or greed, or some other "slight" sin.

Being Religious Not Enough

"Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days...I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them..." (AMOS 4:4; 5:21,22). Amos informs the people that their worship at Bethel and Gilgal are empty. God does not accept them. It was a worship of the self-willed who entered into rituals of their own choosing and not as God had instructed. Golden calves had been set up and became the focus of worship in Israel. A false priesthood had been established, new feast days appointed and the people thought that God would accept it.

Today, as well, men are often not satisfied with the Lord's doctrine concerning worship. New means of worship are brought in and gradually become more and more acceptable. The emphasis becomes worship according to your choice instead of worship according to God's choice. These people, like the people of Jesus' day and our own as well, honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far removed thus rendering their worship vain (MATTHEW 15:8,9),

Call to Repentance

"For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, 'Seek Me that you may live...Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the Lord of Hosts be with you, just as you have said...Perhaps the Lord God of Hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.'" (AMOS 5:4; 14-15). Judgment could be avoided. There was yet time to repair the damages, but it must be on the Lord's terms and not man's. Too many want God on their own terms. It does not work that way. Sometimes we assume that the Lord's mercy will never be exhausted. That is a serious mistake because it lulls us into complacency about things that

need to be changed.

It is a sad thing that many of Amos's day responded to the Lord's last calls to repentance with mocking and indifference. That nation was ultimately destroyed by their own stubborn minds. Will our own nation be any different? And the same questions that can be asked concerning nations can also be addressed to each of us as individuals.

When Opportunity Ceases Knocking

"Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord God, 'When I will send a famine upon the land, not a famine for bread or thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord. And people will stagger from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it." (AMOS 8:11,12). The spiritual and moral darkness with which the land would be left would be complete. Almost in panic, some would search in vain for the way out. Once it had been clear, but no longer. A serious thought is that there do seem to be points on no return; lines that if we cross them that we are incapable of finding our way back ; "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened...and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." (HEBREWS 6:4-6).

A Beam of Hope

"In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations that are called by My name,' declares the Lord who does this." (AMOS 9:11,12). But out of the darkness and ruin the Lord will build something wonderful. David's house and throne shall be re-established. The new David is clearly fulfilled in Christ, the descendant of David. The New Testament confirms this (ACTS 15:14-18; HEBREWS 12:28). Jesus, the Messiah, is our hope and confidence.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.4; April 1997

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Forgetting Bethel and Gilgal

Amos 4:4

About 40 years before the destruction of Samaria, God sent Amos to prophesy about the impending doom of that rebellious people. In this book, God shows his frustration with the chosen people who refused the opportunity to walk with the Lord.

Amos 4:4 shows how the Israelites had forgotten even the basic foundations of their communion with God: "Come to Bethel and transgress, At Gilgal multiply transgression...." God chose his words wisely when he mentioned these two towns, because Bethel and Gilgal represented the very essence of Israel's covenant relationship with God.

Bethel means "House of God" and was the place where Jacob made an important pact with God (Genesis 28:20-22). He erected a memorial to mark that place, and later returned there to worship the Lord (Genesis 35:1-15). There, God promised to give the land of Canaan to Jacob's descendants. Bethel represented God's presence in Israel.

Gilgal is also closely associated with the idea of Israel's special relationship with the Lord. When Joshua led the people into the promised land, they constructed a memorial at Gilgal (Joshua 4:19-20). At that same place, the sons of Israel were circumcised to show that they were leaving behind all the corrupting influence of Egypt (Joshua 5:1-9). The people stayed at Gilgal to celebrate the first Passover in the new land (Joshua 5:10), and later came together at that place to divide the land that God had given to them (Joshua 14:6). Gilgal, like Bethel, represented the presence of God among the Israelites.

But by the time of Amos, these cities were associated with sinful disrespect for God. What Israel was doing was equal to a woman committing adultery on the day of her wedding anniversary, in the same bed she shares with her husband! Israel had forgotten everything special about being God's people.

To use the temple of God today (the Christian's own body 1 Corínthians 6:19-20) to sin against the Lord, is to forget the most fundamental blessings of being God's special people. Let us avoid the sins of Bethel and Gilgal!

By Dennis Allen

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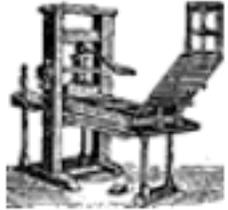
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

What Are You Ignoring?

Amos 4:6-12

Although every experience of life should direct us toward God ["the heavens declare the glory of the Lord;" (Ps. 19:1) we are "fearfully and wonderfully made;" (Ps. 139:14) and God established man and this creation in such a way that we might "seek Him and perhaps grope for Him and find Him." (Acts 17:27)] many people completely miss this point. Many live life either blissfully and ignorantly, or more likely purposefully and sinfully, ignorant of God's intents and purposes for mankind.

The sinful generations of Israel before it's fall to Assyria exemplify this attitude. God repeatedly sent them prophets whom they ignored. "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers." (Jer. 7:25,26) Since words alone were not working in moving the people to repentance, God caused the processes of the natural world to curse and not bless the people to admonish them and call them to repentance.

God first sent famine ("cleanness of teeth"). When nature withholds it's bounty to such an extent that people can no longer eat, people should realize their dependence on God. But sadly God reports, "Yet you have not returned to Me." (vs. 6) Then God sent such a severe drought that people staggered from place to place just to find water. (vss. 7,8) You can survive for quite a long time while starving, but not to long while dying of thirst. Thoughts and hearts should have turned immediately to God. It is one of the enduring memories of my childhood to see men and women gathered on the courthouse steps praying to God for Him to return the rain. But it was not like this in ancient Israel. So the Lord repeats, "Yet you have not returned to Me." (vs. 8)

Later still came blasting hot winds, mildew, and tree and crop destroying worms to afflict them. "Yet you have not returned to Me." (vs. 9) Then came an affliction that was comparable only to the plagues of Egypt. This disaster killed so many soldiers and horses that they could not all be buried and a stench from the bodies filled the entire camp. And again the refrain, "Yet you have not returned to Me."(vs. 10)

We might wonder how the nation even survived. That it did endure has led some to discount the descriptions of these horrors, reducing the language of Amos to mere hyperbole. But these folks did suffer afflictions so severe that it nearly ended them as a nation. That they did not fall is only attributable to the grace of God. They "were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze." (vs. 11) Their survival was only

by God pulling them out of the fire and extinguishing them. If not for this they would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. We would like to report that the people were shaken to the core by their close encounter with total destruction and as a result they repented. But of course they didn't. So again comes the declaration, "Yet you have not returned to Me." (vs. 11)

God's great patience and enduring loving kindness had finally and completely run through. So God moved to make an end of them by running them through the same type of judgments again, but this time not pulling back at the end. Now they are warned "Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (vs. 12)

Since stubbornness embedded deep in the heart is not unique to them, (Rev. 9:20,21; 16:9) it might do us well to consider if God still works with nations in this way today to bring them to repentance. We have every reason to believe that He does. Since we know that even the saints are chastened by God, (Heb. 12:4-7) why would we think that the sinners are exempt? (1 Pet. 4:17,18) Does this mean that every disaster or misfortune is a sign from God directed at the victim? No, Luke 13:1-5 refutes that idea. We know the cause of these things in ancient Israel because a prophet explained them. We don't have that kind of specific instruction today. But established for us is the principle of how God deals with sinful people. Thus, every incident can be instructive and consideration of the fact that God might be acting in this way cannot be dismissed out of hand.

These type of actions by God are rather blunt instruments to be sure. Disasters cannot convey the details (what sin, who sinned, when the sin was, etc.) but they can bring out one great truth - that God is not well pleased. Such a realization would then lead right thinking people to the book of God for specific answers.

But when such chastisements come on others, people automatically say (at least to themselves), "I wonder what they did?" But they never seem to apply the same logic to themselves and ask, "What might I have done?" Despite the continual exhortations of the scripture to examine ourselves, we still much prefer to examine others. This leads to spiritual blindness - the overlooking of many important lessons. Let us stop before we sink to the level of ancient Israel.

Let us again consider the nature and power of God, His hatred of sin and our own sin. Then ask, "What is it that I have ignored and 'Yet have not returned' to the Lord?"

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 8.3; March 2001

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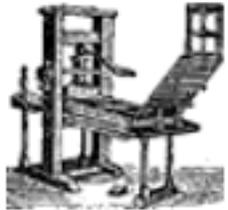
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Prepare To Meet Your God

Amos 4:12

Rebellious Israel was headed to captivity. They would not repent of their sins in spite of all the prophets' warnings and the consequences God continually sent upon them. Amos. 4:6-11 details some of the reproofs. They lacked food, had rains withheld from them to the extent that their cities ran out of water, suffered every type of natural disaster and horrible losses in war. In spite of all of these punishments that decimated them to the point that their destruction was compared to Sodom and Gomorrah, the scriptures repeatedly state, "Yet you have not returned to Me." (vss. 6,8,10,11)

With all that they had suffered, they might have thought that though they were shaken, they were still standing in spite of all that God had to throw at them, and they might yet be all right. Any who might have thought this way were greatly mistaken. Though God had done so much to them, He had not yet begun to exhaust the reservoirs of His resources. That insubordinate people would soon have to meet God fully in judgment. So Amos warned, "Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel; Because I shall do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (vs. 12)

What a horrible thought to have to meet God after having lived so immorally. Meeting God under such circumstance is akin to the sheriff taking the felon from his cell and saying, "Time to face the judge." We might not think ourselves to be (or in fact be) as bad as ancient Israel, but we must still seriously consider Amos' admonition, "Prepare to meet your God" because we will all meet Him. Let us carefully consider this admonition word by word, from last to first.

God

We do not often think as seriously as we should about God, His nature, His holiness and His demands. We often do not contemplate that one day we will be personally examined by the Just and Upright Creator of all things. Immediately after telling the people to prepare, Amos reminded them of God's surpassing greatness, "For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind And declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness And treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of hosts is His name." (vs. 13) He knows and controls all physical matter and, frighteningly for us, He knows our thoughts. As another scripture says, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13)

Your

He is "our" God whether we acknowledge Him or not. We must realize that we are never away from His

presence. "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there" (Ps. 139:7,8) That fact that we would deny God does not change the fact that He is still watching and noting our deeds for judgment. "Can a man hide himself in hiding places, So I do not see him?" declares the LORD." (Jer. 23:24)

Our God is not only ever present in life, but He will also be present after death. Just as Amos admonished Israel to prepare, Solomon taught all to give thought to God. "Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Eccl. 12:6,7)

For too many, meeting God at death will be a first introduction. This is not because God did not make Himself known, but because they ignored to all that God has said and done. God has spoken, but they have not listened.

To Meet

The unprepared will meet with God just as certainly as the prepared will. The scriptures teach that an interview with God is inevitable. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10) God does not want you to come ignorant and unprepared. He sent His prophets, and later His son and the apostles, telling men to prepare. He also furnished conclusive proof that the judgment meeting will come. "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30,31)

Prepare

The need to prepare to meet God is clearly recognized by all who understand what will happen when we meet. There will be a thorough judgment of all sinners based on all their sins. "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." (Rev. 20:12) Since we know that this will happen, will we get properly prepared?

Some make inadequate preparations. Secular education is not proper preparation to meet God. "The world through its wisdom did not come to know God" (Col. 1:21) Moses found this out. He "was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds," (Acts 7:22) but he was still not prepared to meet the Lord when He appeared in the burning bush. We will be no more prepared to meet God in judgment than Moses was with only what man can teach us. Denial of the afterlife by the arguments of atheism, the self delusion of either rationalism or emotionalism, or the false comforts brought by false doctrines are all equally inadequate. Even morality, which many practice to the point of penance, fasting and prayer, without the truth that is known only in the gospel, is inadequate. We can never be good enough to meet God on our own terms or accomplishments. "He

saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." (Tit. 3:5)

The only proper and effective preparations to make to meet God are revealed in His word. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word." (Ps. 119:9) "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." (Eccl. 12:13,14)

Those who have never been "obedient from the heart to that form of doctrine" (Rom. 6:17) which is revealed only in the gospel must begin by submitting in "obedience to the truth [to] purify your souls." (1 Pet. 1:22) This is done by having faith in Jesus the Messiah; (Jn. 3:16, 8:24, Heb. 11:6) repenting of sins by leaving them and committing to live the holy life the gospel demands; (Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30) and by being baptized in water in Jesus name. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16) Without doing these things that God instructs, no man has even begun to prepare to meet the Lord.

But having begun your preparations is not the same as completing your preparations. Consider Noah, who "in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household." (Heb. 11:7) Think if Noah had stopped preparing before he had "cover[ed] it inside and out with pitch." (Gen. 6:14) He would have spent a year in a very leaky boat. Do you think he would have been willing to risk his life and the lives of his family without making all the preparations that God said to make? But how many Christians risk their souls with so much left undone, inside and out, when it comes to morals, faithfulness, and service? How many need to heed the warnings of the Lord? "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love...because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." (Rev. 2:4; 3:16)

Any Christian who is no longer completely ready to meet their God has only one way to become prepared again. You must return to Christ with full devotion. This is what the Lord directed the unprepared in His churches, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place -- unless you repent." (Rev. 2:5) Or as Peter told a man in sin, "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you." (Acts 8:22) So repent, pray and reform. You're not prepared until you do.

The old saying, well based in scripture, is that "Heaven is a prepared palace for a prepared people." This reflects what Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." (Jn. 14:2) It is prepared for us. We must be equally prepared for it.

It is essential that we are prepared to meet God. The alternative is simply too horrible to contemplate. "And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth...these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life... these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." (Matt. 25:30,41; 2 Thess. 1:9)

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Obadiah's Prophecy

Minor Prophets Series (#2)

The shortest book in the Old Testament is the book of Obadiah. It was written about five centuries before Christ and deals with some things that were going to happen to the ancient kingdom of Edom, and has some things to say that are needful for today. Not only does Obadiah deal with the coming destruction of the nation of Edom, he also tells why God is so angry with them. However, it is the end of this short book that captures our attention as it foretells of the coming of God's kingdom and salvation for those of all nations. Not only did the prophecy of Edom's destruction come to pass just as predicted, so also did the prophecy of salvation find its fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

Historical Background

"The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom-" (Obadiah 1). The nation of Edom was made up of the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob and the son of Isaac. Jacob, from whom the nation of Israel came, and Esau seemed to be in constant competition with one another. This friction began while they were yet in the womb (Genesis 25:22-26). Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew because he thought he was so hungry. Hatred and bitterness existed on the part of Esau toward Jacob after that, and grew in its intensity after Jacob tricked him out of his father's blessing. Esau wanted to kill Jacob and so Jacob fled and did not return home for many years. The book of Hebrews warns Christians not to belittle the value of spiritual blessings and uses Esau as an example: "That there be no immoral or godless person like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal." (Hebrews 12:16). It seems as if the nation of Edom had adopted their ancestor's lack of morality and spirituality.

As the descendants of these two individuals grew into nations over the centuries, they were separated from one another by Israel's servitude in Egypt. It was during the Exodus that the two nations first came into contact. Israel expected Edom's cooperation because of their common heritage through Isaac, but the Edomites were hostile. When asked for permission to pass through their land on the way to Canaan, Edom refused and threatened to attack (Numbers 20:14-21) In the future, Edom would delight at any calamity that would befall Israel, at times joining with Israel's enemies in looting the land. Finally, Edom was conquered by David (II Samuel 8:14). Edom successfully revolted years later during the reign of Jehoram, but soon both Israel and Edom became subjects of Babylon. Interestingly enough, Edom became known as Idumea from which the Herods came who ruled when Jesus lived.

Edom's Transgressions

"The arrogance of your heart has deceived you... because of the violence to your brother Jacob... foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem -- you too were one of them... ." (Obadiah 3,10,11). Edom had become a carnal people with no thought given to loyalty, justice or mercy. With greed they would look upon the possessions of others, happy to take advantage of the misfortune of others to enrich themselves. They were extremely prideful thinking themselves indestructible. They were wrong about that as Obadiah warns and history bears out.

Edom was prideful (vs. 3). The wise man said, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." (Proverbs 16:18,19). Pride was the source of Edom's weakness.

Edom was violent (vs 10). Edom's children grew up in an environment of violence and a "might makes right" attitude. Certainly such attitudes were displayed toward one another as well as outsiders.

Edom gloated over their brother's disaster (vs. 12). They rejoiced over the disaster of others. Instead of compassion there was rejoicing. Edom was a cruel and callused people.

Edom joined in looting Israel (vs 13). Self interest brought about treachery. It was a nation without ethics or principles.

Edom oppressed the fugitives (vs. 14). Edomites would set up ambushes to attack fleeing refugees to rob, kill or enslave.

For these reasons God promises to send judgment upon Edom. "The day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done unto you. Your dealings shall return on your own head." (vs. 15) Edom would dismiss the warning. Their arrogance would not allow them to admit the possibility of their defeat. Their high mountain fortresses make them impervious to attack. Yet the Lord promises to bring them down (vs. 3,4).

Modern Applications

"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4). God promises to bring judgment upon Edom. God continues to involve Himself in human events as His purpose dictates. I do not suppose it would have been easy for the Israelite of Obadiah's day to find much evidence of God's intervention, but later Israelites would be able to look back and see it. Sometimes I suppose it is difficult to see God at work in our own world. Part of the reason is that we do not know the all end results toward which God is working. Also, we do not see things as God sees them and our ways are not His ways (Isaiah 55:8). Additionally, God achieves His purposes sometimes by direct intervention while at other times simply by permitting things to occur. For example, He permitted Judas to betray His Son because the betrayal advanced His purpose to provide the world a Redeemer.

The point is this: Do not think that God's purposes will be thwarted by man. Even when our nation and world seems to be going in the opposite direction from which they should, trust God to achieve His

purposes, and live by faith.

Another point is how God looks upon actions and attitudes such as pride, indifference toward others' misfortune, and greed. To be envious of our brothers or sisters or to be bitter toward them is un-Christlike and shameful. In Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan He shows in the conduct and attitude of the priest and Levite how ungodly it is to be able to help a brother in need but refuse (Luke 10:31-32; see also Philippians 2:2-4; James 3:14-15; I John 3:14-16; 4:20,21).

Mount Zion

"But on Mount Zion there will be those that escape, and it will be holy... the deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord's." (Obadiah 17,21). In the final section of the book of Obadiah there is a prophecy concerning the Lord's coming kingdom. Note several aspects of this prophecy and its fulfillment in Christ:

"And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions." (vs 17b). The house of Jacob refers not merely to the physical descendants of Israel, but to spiritual Israel, the redeemed in Christ (Luke 1:33).

The possession of the nations in verse 19 by Israel refers to Gentiles from these places accepting Christ as their king and has reference to the conversion of the Gentiles (see Numbers 24:15-24; Amos 9:11-12). This is the application of this prophecy that is made in the New Testament (Acts 15:15-18). The point is this: We live in a time when many look at the world the same way the Edomites did. Because of this, there is suffering and godlessness. Is there any escape? Yes: The Lord has provided deliverance. We may take refuge on Mount Zion and put our trust in King Jesus. He will deliver us and give eternal victory. "But you have come to Mount Zion... to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant." (Hebrews 12:22-24). We are now invited to take our places on spiritual Mount Zion, the church of Christ. "Therefore, since we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28,29).

By Jon W. Quinn
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Jonah: Some Things From Which You Cannot Run Away

Minor Prophets Series (#1)

Probably the most well known of the minor prophets is Jonah. The book which bears his name is quite different from the other eleven. Its message deals with Jonah's relationship with God rather than with what he taught. The important lessons of the book have not so much to do with what Jonah taught others as they do with what God taught Jonah.

Jonah was an early prophet among the twelve "minor prophets". He prophesied about 780 B.C. during the days that King Jereboam II reigned over Israel. We are informed of this in the historical books of the Old Testament rather than in the book of Jonah itself (2 Kings 14:23-25).

Jonah was very loyal to Israel and despised any enemy of his people. He was especially bitter toward Assyria and its capital city of Nineveh. Before we criticize Jonah too severely for his lack of concern for the Ninevites, it must be remembered that the Assyrians were a very cruel people bent on conquering the world. They had spread much misery, suffering and death among the Israelites living along the northern border of Israel. If something like that occurred along our own borders, you and I would also probably find it difficult to have much concern about the welfare of those causing the trouble. Jonah hated Assyria, and that is the main problem Jonah had with the particular mission that God handed to him. Jonah was told to go and preach in Nineveh urging repentance. Jonah would much rather see them destroyed.

Lessons From the Book

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai..." (Jonah 1:1). There are some very important and valid lessons for our own day found in this ancient book. Homer Hailey, in his commentary on the minor prophets, lists five as follows, with our own additional commentary on each point added on:

National sin demands national repentance. Each nation has its own character which continues to develop as time goes on. Sometimes we see nations growing stronger, correcting past mistakes and seeking higher ground. At other times we see periods of national degradation where former ideals and principles are discarded and the nation suffers from moral confusion. Unfortunately, one cannot look at the state of our own nation today without recognizing that extremely negative things are happening to its character.

One cannot run away from God. When God assigns a duty that is disagreeable to us, what is our

response to be? I am certain that many members of the church are running away from their responsibilities just as surely as Jonah did. They may not be on board a ship headed in the opposite direction, but they state in no uncertain terms by their own inactivity and neglect that they have no intention of fulfilling their obligations to God because they are too busy with other things.

God is able to use all the incidents in the lives of His people for their good and for His glory.

Sometimes, good can come from even our mistakes. Today, the testimony of others about how Christians deal with tragedy or personal loss can accomplish much good, if we as God's children show the right kind of thinking at such times. Opportunity begets challenge. At this particular time in Ninevah's history, the people were dejected. The economy was depressed and the Ninevites were looking for answers. It was time to forget the past and grasp the present. Likewise today, when opportunities open themselves locally and around the world, it is time to respond according to our ability to get the work of God accomplished.

The infinite concern of God for life is shown in contrast to the concern of man for the material.

Sometimes people get their priorities mixed up. Jonah did. When material gain or loss becomes more important than human well being, then someone has gotten his priorities confused. Much of this type of confusion exists today in our materialistic society (Jonah 4:5-11).

Jonah Runs From His Duty

"Arise, and go to Ninevah the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:2,3).

Jonah certainly underestimated the Lord. If Jonah could find Tarshish, then so could the Lord! In fact, had Jonah made it that far, he would have found the Lord was already there! They say you always need a "plan B". Jonah didn't have one, but it does not matter because it would not have worked either.

The rest of the chapter deals with how the Lord caused a storm to threaten the ship. The seamen began to call upon their gods and Jonah is encouraged to call upon his God as well. It was determined that it was Jonah's God who was displeased with him and that this was the cause of the storm. Jonah informed the crew that the only way to avert disaster was to throw him overboard. They did not want to do so, but as the storm grew more violent they finally relented and gave Jonah the "heave-ho." No mention is made as to whether they returned his fare (I would notice something like this) and Jonah sank beneath the waves.

The storm stopped and the seamen "feared the Lord greatly, and they offered sacrifice to the Lord and made vows." (Jonah 1:16). It was then that a great fish of the Lord's designation swallowed Jonah giving him some rather cramped living conditions for the next three days. The storm was an act of God. It was not a miracle, however, because storms can and do naturally occur. But when the fish swallowed Jonah, and Jonah lived within it beneath the waves for three days; that was a miracle. People cannot naturally survive such an ordeal. Some say this proves the story is made up. I say it only proves the power of God.

It should not be surprising that the Creator of all things could make the necessary arrangements, unless one just doesn't believe in the Creator to begin with.

It Is Time To Apologize

"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord God from the stomach of the fish." (Jonah 2:1). Jonah described his pitiful state in the second chapter. He restated his devotion to God and his willingness to be faithful to God. With this repentance, the Lord directed the fish to expel Jonah onto dry land, and then reissued the command: "Arise, and go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." (Jonah 3:2). It occurs to me that it would have saved Jonah much grief to have simply obeyed the Lord to begin with, and there is probably a lesson there for us as well.

Jonah Obeys the Lord

"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord..." (Jonah 3:3). The reaction of the people in the city was remarkable! They responded to Jonah's preaching by repenting of their evil. There were probably several reasons for this. The timing was right in that the people were suffering distress. There had been military setbacks in the north and the war efforts had drained the nation economically. The standard of living had plummeted. Food was becoming scarce.

Also, Jonah was supposed to be dead. He had been thrown overboard many, many miles from shore in the middle of a horrible storm. And now, there he was alive, and calling for repentance. The people listened. The king even issued a decree to fast and to call upon God. Incidentally, historians have discovered evidence of a brief exercise of monotheism in Nineveh about this time. Now we know why. "...for I knew that Thou art a compassionate God..." (Jonah 4:2).

Jonah is not at all pleased with the results of his preaching. He hated Nineveh and felt very sorry to have had a part to play in their salvation. "Therefore, now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better for me than life." (Jonah 4:3).

The Lord reasoned with Jonah, who sat outside the city hoping that maybe God would destroy it after all. God caused a plant to grow over Jonah to give him shade from the hot sun. Then, God caused the plant to die, which made Jonah all the more miserable. As Jonah complained, the Lord pointed out that to have compassion for a plant while at the same time not caring if a huge city of human beings was destroyed was certainly a mix up of priorities! It seems as if many today have a similar set of false standards of value. Human life is expendable but save the trees! It was not right for Jonah and neither is it right today.

By Jon W. Quinn
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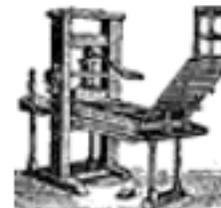


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The Word of the Lord Came to Micah

Minor Prophets Series #6

Micah began his work as a prophet about 735 B.C. and continued up until about 700 B.C. He directed most of his words to Judah, the southern part of the divided kingdom, though some remarks are directed toward the northern kingdom of Israel (also referred to as Samaria). It is during this time frame that the predicted carrying away of the northern kingdom of Israel into Assyrian captivity takes place. Israel's infidelity had finally brought forth its bitterest fruit. It had been a long time coming and God had been more than patient, giving His people over two centuries in which to repent.

But Micah deals mainly with the southern kingdom and the more faithful of the two. Where Israel had one corrupt leader after another, Judah had ups and downs. There were periods of faithfulness to God as well as periods of digression and apostasy.

At the beginning of Micah's work, Judah is enjoying prosperity under the reign of Uzziah not seen since the days of Solomon. Unfortunately, and as was usually the case, Judah (also referred to as "Jerusalem" which was its capital city) did not deal with their prosperity very well, and declined morally and spiritually. Uzziah was succeeded by his son Jotham who was a good king and the nation continued to prosper. After Jotham came Ahaz, who was one of the worst kings Judah had in about every way possible. Judah saw a steep decline during his reign. Ahaz was succeeded by Hezekiah, an exceptional king who sought to bring about social, political and spiritual reforms. His dependence upon God brought about the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the powerful besieging Assyrian army. Though the king's decree brought about the needed actions, unfortunately it seems as if the peoples' hearts were not in the reforms. One cannot change hearts through decrees. The results are Micah's warnings that proper actions without proper motive are not enough, and later history will show that following wicked kings are able to reverse the progress of Judah under Hezekiah almost overnight. It seems as if Judah is either too far gone already or too wishy washy to be firm in their resolve to obey the Lord. For that reason, in about another century, Judah will suffer a similar fate as Israel had as they are also taken into captivity. Though they did better than their brethren to the north, and because of that lasted longer, ultimately their lack of enduring loyalty to God will bring their downfall as well.

MICAH; AN OVERVIEW

"The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." (MICAH 1:1). There are several

prominent themes of Micah's prophecy. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, addressed many of the same things Isaiah did. But it seems that where Isaiah did most of his work in Jerusalem among the elite of society, Micah did his in the country among the people. Where Isaiah dealt with kings and leaders, civil policies and the religious leadership, Micah chiefly dealt with the social and moral issues of the common people, and the adverse affect the leadership was having on them.

Micah promises the coming judgment of God upon His people because of their disobedience, including both the houses of Israel as well as Judah. His point is that if the people deal faithfully with God and one another, Jehovah will bless them. But if they behave wickedly, they will lose their blessings. Another strong point is made that people cannot obtain the good graces of God by empty following ritual. Micah also gives a clear revelation concerning the coming Messiah yet 700 years in the future, revealing several specific aspects about Him and His kingdom.

THE LORD'S JUDGMENT

"For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth...All this is for the rebellion of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the rebellion of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?" (MICAH 1:3-5). The first chapter deals with the coming judgment and destruction of both Israel and Judah. In the second and third chapters some of the reasons why are given. They "scheme iniquity" and "work out evil on their beds!" (2:1). In other words, they lie awake at night dreaming up evil plans for the next day. They figure out ways to unjustly rob others of their fields, houses and inheritances (2:2). The Lord will repay their greed by taking everything away from them (2:3-5).

Micah also charges both false prophet and people by saying that they prefer easy, soft prophecies to those urging repentance and warning of the dangers of their present path. Particularly interesting is Micah's accusation of the peoples' lack of concern for what is true and right in favor of what is appealing: "If a man walking after wind and falsehood had told lies and said, 'I will speak to you concerning wine and liquor,' he would be spokesman to this people." (MICAH 2:11). Can you imagine supposed religious leaders using the pulpit to encourage drunkenness and other illicit behavior? Micah says that such would be right up these peoples' alley.

Micah levels more charges against the leadership of the land in chapter three. Vividly, he portrays the rulers of using their offices to betray the people and enrich themselves at the expense of the nation. The false prophets lead the people astray. Judges accept bribes and religion has become big business to the prophets and priests. For these things calamity will fall upon the nation.

Please remember that Micah is talking about events which took place seven centuries before Christ. You might need to remind yourself of this often, because it sounds so much like he is talking not about Israel and Judah, but about twentieth century America.

HOPE, AS ALWAYS, IN THE COMING PROMISED MESSIAH

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth from Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." (MICAH 5:2). There are several rather long discourses about future events, including

discussions about the Messiah to come. In the reference above, several things are stated about Him: He will arrive in Bethlehem, a small village in Judah. He will be a ruler of Israel. He is eternal. Jesus was born in Bethlehem (MATTHEW 2:5,6). Jesus was born to be a king over spiritual Israel (JOHN 18:36,37). Jesus is eternal (JOHN 1:1-3). Jesus fulfilled every detail of Micah's prophecies about Himself. The place of His birth was no lucky guess, but by the inspiration of God (LUKE 24:27; 44-47).

Another aspect of the coming Messiah is the nature of His kingdom and gospel. "And it will come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord will be established as the chief of mountains. I will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream into it. And many nations will come and say, 'Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.' For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (MICAH 4:1-2). Several points are made here about events which would occur seven centuries later. God's mountain, or kingdom, would be established. It would not be limited to only those of Israel or Judah, but people from all nations would become its citizens. Citizenship would not be by literal birth, but through receiving the teachings of the Messiah. The kingdom and the word of the Lord would begin at Jerusalem. Again, these prophecies find their fulfillment in first century events. The Lord's spiritual kingdom was established (MARK 1:15; 9:1; COLOSSIANS 1:13). Following Jesus' ascension to His heavenly throne, the gospel was preached, beginning at Jerusalem (ACTS 2:1-4). The first century saw the gospel preached to all nations as people from various cultures responded and were added to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, His church (MARK 16:15,16; ACTS 10: 34,35; COLOSSIANS 1:23; HEBREWS 12:22,23).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.6; June 1997

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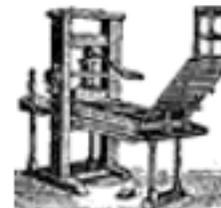


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What Does the Lord Require? (Micah 6:8)

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (NKJV)

The Pharisees of the New Testament were obviously not the first Jews to believe that the letter of the law outweighs the spirit of the law. The Pharisees' form of "checklist godliness" was obviously being practiced by the hearers of Micah's prophecy.

Micah 6:8 reminds us of the conditions God set on His promises to Abraham, namely to do righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19). Additionally, the directions for Israel from God (via Moses) come to mind: And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? (Deut. 10:12,13)

Both Samuel and Hosea emphasize God's preference for obedience, knowledge, and mercy over sacrifice and burnt offerings. (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6.)

With all of these Old Testament passages in view let's examine Micah's three imperatives if man wishes to fulfill the Lord's requirements and come to realize and live "what is good."

To Do Justly

Adam Clarke suggests that for man to do justly, he must render unto everyone that which is due to them. Of course Clarke does not mean "what is due them" in men's eyes, but "what is due them" according to God's will.

To give God His due. God is deserving of our heart, body, soul, and spirit; our wisdom, understanding, judgment. Jesus tells us (Mk. 12:28-30) that the first commandment is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Because He created us in His own image, God rightly and justly deserves all of our worship and adoration. "This is the first commandment."

To give your neighbor his due. Jesus continues (Mk 12:31) His discussion of the greatest commandments with the second, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Can we sin against

someone we truly love? Perhaps we might momentarily sin against a loved one, but not continually. True love desires to bless and not to injure. Note however that we are not to give that which is due to God to any man - neighbor or self.

To give to yourself what you are due. According to Paul, we are not our own but instead our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). So what we have coming must be tempered by what we must avoid. Paul reminds us first of all to "flee sexual immorality." Elsewhere Paul gives us lists of characteristics to avoid and attain (Gal. 5:19-25)

To Love Mercy

God realized what man has come to know; justice, while necessary, can be cold and unfeeling. (Micah 7:18.) To do justly alone is not sufficient for a child of God; we must love mercy and do what it requires. Mercy comes from characteristics that include kindness, benevolence, and charity. Part of what mercy requires is to be willing to forgive the sins of others as God is willing to forgive our sins. It is this aspect of mercy through which our own salvation comes (Titus 3:5).

To Walk Humbly

But how are we to do this? We must first acknowledge our sins and then be willing to submit to God's mercy. It is only through a humbling of ourselves that we will be allowed to walk with God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5.) Paul points out that it is high-mindedness that leads to unbelief and lack of faith in the power of God (Rom. 11:20; 12:3). The humble attitude required by the Lord will make itself manifest in a life of prayer, contrition, and service.

What Then, Is Good?

Homer Hailey suggests that "the 'good' that [God] requires is the doing of His will." To accomplish that lofty (yet necessary) goal man must act toward God and man according to the divine standard of righteousness revealed in God's will; he must show every man a compassionate warm-heartedness; and walk humbly in recognition of the absolute holiness and righteousness of God by submitting to God through obedience to His desire and will. (Hailey, A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, p. 214.)

There is no "Christian To Do List." It is just not that simple. And yet we know that living Christ-like is not impossible (Mt. 11:29,30). But we must be mindful it is a "life" and not a series of accomplishments.

By Carey Dillinger
From Expository Files 11.3, March, 2004

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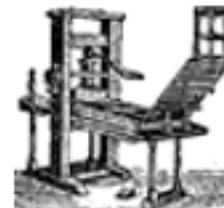


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Nahum: The Lord's Vengeance on Nineveh

Minor Prophets Series #8

Nahum's name means "comfort" or "consolation." But when you read his prophecy you do not feel very comforted because it is a prophecy of the Lord's vengeance. But these words of promised destruction and devastation are words of comfort to the Lord's people, for they are directed against one of the most bloodthirsty and cruel civilizations ever known; the Assyrian empire and its capital city of Nineveh. When such an oppressive enemy is dealt with, then those who have suffered do find relief and comfort when the enemy falls.

NINEVEH'S HISTORY

"The oracle of Ninevah. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite." (NAHUM 1:1). Ninevah had a policy of world conquest and domination. A part of their plans included God's chosen people, Israel and Judah. The Scriptures relate to us how both Israel and Judah fell away from God. Of the two, Judah was the most faithful and so lasted longer than her northern brethren in Israel.

Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.) was the first Assyrian king to raid into Israel and deported some as slaves back to Assyria.

Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) began to lay siege to Samaria, the capital city of apostate Israel, but died before the city fell.

Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) completed the siege of Samaria which fell to him and Israel ceased to exist as a nation and was deported into captivity by Assyria. This was in accordance with the prophetic warnings that had been given to her through the many prophets God had sent to her urging her to repent, but to whom she refused to listen.

Sennecherib (705-681 B.C.) This Assyrian monarch invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the faithful king of Judah, prayed for deliverance and received it. Sennecherib was murdered by two of his sons who were in turn driven out by another son who became king.

Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.)

Ashurbanipal (668-625 B.C.) His campaign reached into Egypt and resulted in the destruction of the

Egyptian city of Thebes (referred to as No-amon in Nahum). Said to be extremely cruel.

[Assur-etil-ilani \(625-620 B.C.\)](#)

[Esarhaddon III \(620-612 B.C.\)](#) Also known as Sin-shar-ishkeen, this king has the distinction of being in power when Nahum's predicted destruction of Nineveh occurs. When Nineveh was besieged by the Medes and the Chaldeans, he gathered his wives and children and wealth into his palace and burned it down, dying in the flames.

(Much of the above background material was gleaned from A Commentary on the Minor Prophets by Homer Hailey.)

Regarding the extreme cruelty of Assyria, their own records bragging of their victories is proof enough. Far from trying to cover their brutality, they actually gloried in it. Their monuments and histories brag about how "space failed for corpses" and about "how unsparing a destroyer is Assyria's goddess Ishtar." They brag about how high the pyramids of human heads were which they built from their conquered foes and how they burned cities and impaled human beings and cut off hands and flayed bodies and so forth. Nahum announces that the time for divine judgment has arrived. Such words of destruction indeed would be words of comfort to a world so tormented by Assyrian cruelty. Perhaps, too, we can better understand Jonah's hesitancy to take the Lord's warning to Nineveh a century before. He did not want Nineveh to repent. He wanted it to be destroyed. He felt it would be much better that way, the problem was that it had not been his decision to make.

[THE LORD IS SLOW TO ANGER AND GREAT IN POWER](#)

"A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful...the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." (NAHUM 1:3,4). The date of Nahum's prophecy is between 663 and 612 B.C. We know this from the historical information in the book showing that Thebes had already fallen (663) but that Nineveh had not yet fallen (612). Most put the writing around 630 B.C. or later.

The Lord is characterized as jealous and avenging and wrathful. This is not a side of God that many care to think about or even admit that exists. I am afraid that many of us today pretend the same thing apostate Israel did during these times; that either God will not or cannot execute judgment on wicked nations. But just because the Lord is slow to anger does not mean that He lacks the power or will to act. Israel found out the hard way. So did Assyria.

Speaking of being slow to anger, it had been a century since Jonah had preached to Nineveh and the city had repented. Evidently, the repentance had been short-lived, though there is some archaeological evidence of a brief encounter with monotheism on the part of Nineveh about Jonah's time. After a century of extreme cruelty and wickedness, God's slowness to anger was running out. Nahum points out that when God acts, none can stop Him (1:6).

Even in the midst of this oracle of judgment, there is a reminder that God is good and that He is a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him. God's severity does not

diminish from His goodness, nor does His goodness diminish from His severity. He is not "either/or" but He is both. "Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise, you, also will be cut off." (ROMANS 11:22, cf. 2:2-11).

The words of comfort to the people of Judah are found in the final verse of the first chapter: "Behold... Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; Pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one (Assyria) pass through you; he will be cut off completely." (NAHUM 1:15).

THE FALL OF NINEVEH

"And it will come about that all who see you will shrink away from you and say, 'Nineveh is devastated! Who will grieve for her?' Where will I seek comforters for you?" (NAHUM 3:7). Nineveh is to be utterly destroyed. The Lord says that He will find none to mourn her passing. Chapter two begins with the warning that Nineveh's destroyer is coming and describes the defensive preparations Nineveh attempts (2:1,2). The approaching army has their shields colored red and its soldiers are dressed in scarlet. This seems to identify the Chaldeans as the ones who would destroy Nineveh, whose soldiers indeed were dressed in red (see Ezekiel 23:14). The plunder and destruction of the cruel, once proud city is then vividly described throughout the remainder of the book.

An important point to be made here is the fruitlessness of any attempt to thwart divine judgment. The Lord challenges Nineveh to man the fortress and watch the road and to summon all your strength. None of it will matter. Men cannot withstand God and prevail. Not Assyria. Not Babylon. Not Rome. And not even our own nation should we continue to follow the course away from God.

All of the events prophesied in this book came to pass. In 612 B.C. Nineveh fell to Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Chaldeans. Judah survived intact until it, too, was carried away into captivity by Babylon (the Chaldeans). Judah would suffer captivity, and a remnant of both Judah and Israel would repent and return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The nation would be reborn, because God was not finished with them yet. Then, six centuries after the fall of Assyria, and in accordance with God's timetable, the Messiah would come, born in Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah. Not even powerful, wicked Assyria could thwart God's plan. Today, the ancient city is barely discernible. The place where it once stood consists of two mounds of earth. Indeed its destruction was complete and final. Unlike with Judah, there would be no rebirth for Nineveh. "Whatever you devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it. Distress will not rise up twice." (NAHUM 1:9).

By Jon W. Quinn
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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Habakkuk: "The Righteous Shall Live By His Faith."

Minor Prophets Series #9

Perhaps of all the minor prophets, Habakkuk's prophecy hits home to many of us. He asks the question that comes to mind when righteous individuals suffer the consequences of living in a sinful society. Is it fair that the righteous suffer due to the faithlessness of their neighbors? Why don't just the criminals suffer for their acts of crime? Why must the innocent also suffer?

It is as plain as can be. Throughout history, when governments are corrupt, everyone suffers. When a nation suffers for its immorality, even those who have remained steadfast suffer the consequences of the immorality. We see it plainly in our own society today. Innocent people live in fear in their crime-ridden neighborhoods. Drug addicts and gangs prey upon the innocent to support themselves. Diseases that are spread by immorality find a way to affect even those who have never partaken in the immoral acts which cause them. Corruption and fraud in government costs everybody. Honesty becomes an outdated concept to most. Moral principles and standards as taught in the Scriptures, and those who choose to live by them, are regarded as foolish and mocked by the entertainment and news media.

What is in store for our nation? As things grow progressively worse, and society falls apart as our once sacred institutions collapse, must the righteous also suffer with the guilty? The book of Habakkuk both asks and answers that question as well as gives other information concerning such downfalls of nations.

Background to Habakkuk

"The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. 'How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and wilt Thou not hear? I cry out unto Thee, 'Violence!' Yet Thou dost not save...therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore, justice comes out perverted.'" (HABAKKUK 1:1-4). Habakkuk was written around 612 to 606 B.C. A series of prophets had warned that the consequences of apostasy from God would ultimately lead to the downfall of the nation of Judah and captivity. Habakkuk writes just previous to the beginning of the fulfillment of these warnings. Chaldea, or Babylon, had been growing in power and spreading out to consume the other nations around it. The Assyrians, the ancient enemies of both Israel and Judah, had been conquered by the Chaldeans in 612 B.C. This, too, had been in accordance with the prophecies. As more nations fell to this new empire, it was drawing ever closer to Judah. Habakkuk's message is given just before Judah

itself is invaded. The first invasions and the carrying away of the first group of Judah's population will occur in 605 B.C. Judah's fall will be complete in 586 B.C when Jerusalem is destroyed and the last deportation is made.

The Reason for Judgment

"Why does Thou make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. " (HABAKKUK 1:3). The book begins with Habakkuk complaining about the wickedness that pervades the land. In the first four verses he complains about the violence, iniquity, wickedness, destruction, strife, contention, lack of law, and perversion of justice in the land. His is a cry unto God to do something about it. He felt the same sorrow as he witnessed the corruption of Judah as any righteous American feels when he considers America's own similar dilemma. We can well imagine a lump in Habakkuk's throat as he looks at the temple standing in Jerusalem but no longer used to glorify Jehovah. It would be much like hearing the National Anthem of our own country, seeing our flag fluttering in the breeze, and remembering the noble principles upon which our own nation was founded but which now seem to be discarded. Habakkuk thus asks, "How long will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear?" They say to be careful what you ask for because you may get it.

God's Answer

"Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days - You would not believe it if you were told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs." (HABAKKUK 1:5,6). The warnings had been coming for generations. The people had not responded. There had been some good times under good leadership, but much of Judah's history had been like taking two steps backwards for every step forward as far as their spirituality and morality were concerned. So the Lord tells Habakkuk that the time has come. Habakkuk had wanted the Lord to do something drastic, and the Lord informs Habakkuk that this has been His plan all along. He is raising up the Chaldeans to punish Judah for their infidelity. They will fly like an eagle swooping down to devour and collect captives like sand and laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it (HABAKKUK 1:8-10). Habakkuk had pleaded for the injustice and wickedness to cease in Judah, and God promises it shall for Judah will fall into the hands of Chaldea.

Habakkuk's Objection

"Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look upon wickedness with favor. Why does Thou look with favor upon those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those who are more righteous than they? (HABAKKUK 1:13). It is important to see that Habakkuk's objection is based upon his belief in God's justice and righteousness. As wicked as Judah has become, Chaldea is much worse. How could God allow Judah to be punished by giving them into Chaldea's hands? At least there are a few righteous persons left in Judah. What will happen to them when the Chaldeans invade? And will not this be looked upon by the Chaldeans as some kind of reward? That they can get by with being as wicked as they want to be and gain from it at the same time?

The Lord's Assurances and Lessons to be Learned

"I will stand on my guard post and station myself upon the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved." (HABAKKUK 2:1). Habakkuk has stated his case and feels it is a pretty good one. He awaits an answer and it comes. He is told to write it down (2:2).

"Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him." (2:4). The Lord knows that the Chaldeans are wicked. They are not conquerors because they are interested in doing the Lord's work and punishing Judah for their sin. They are conquerors because they are wicked, greedy and treacherous. The day will come when Babylon, after having served God's purpose, will itself be invaded, looted and destroyed. "The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter disgrace will come upon your glory." (see 2:6-17). Chaldea will get away with nothing! Likewise, there will be a day of reckoning for all who do wickedly. Even those today who suppose they are getting away with committing sin and mock those who try to live righteously.

"But the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4b). Whatever happens, those who are righteous will live by their faith. Whether the Chaldeans come or not. Whether the moral climate improves or not. In all circumstances, good or bad, the righteous continue to live by faith. Our faith is not tied to prosperity or poverty; sickness or health; the morality or lack of it in others. It is tied to our God and His word (ROMANS 10:17). Whatever happens to our own nation today, the righteous shall live by his faith.

"Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength..." (HABAKKUK 3:18,19). Habakkuk now understands. Come what may, He will continue to trust in God, even in the most terrible of storms. He will be secure and happy, even as his nation falls and everything he knows is swept away. He knows that even in the darkest hour, the righteous will never be forgotten by God. Whatever is in the future for our own nation, be sure to always remember that.

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.9; September 1997

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Just Shall Live By Faith

Habakkuk 2:4

Introduction

Hab 2:4 ... "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." (NKJ)

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the greatest declarations of faith to be found in all the Bible. It presents a contrast between those who are arrogantly rebellious, and those who are humbly submissive. It reveals the striking difference between the proud and the just man. The future belongs to the righteous, while the wicked have no future. Wickedness carries with it the seeds of its own destruction (Psa 10:4; Pro 16:18). Pride, tyranny and evil cannot last, but the righteous shall live by faith (Hab 2:4).

In this immediate context, the pride of the Chaldeans would be their downfall, while the faithfulness of the righteous will be his salvation. Habakkuk says the Babylonians are self-centered and therefore doomed; the righteous are God-centered and therefore triumphant (Dan 4:30-32; Pro 3:5-6).

In other words, the righteous man trusts, not in himself, but in God. His faith is directed upward, not inward!

Herein is faith -- the ability to accept as reality what one cannot fully understand. The one who trusts in God is not troubled by the enigmas of life.

He knows that God does all things right and all things well. Running the universe is God's business, but the righteous man has a daily task to fulfill, and he will live by his faithfulness. He will trust and obey, even if he does not comprehend all of God's ways.

The Revell Bible Dictionary defines faith as "belief, confidence, trust, reliance. In the Bible, religious faith is a life-shaping attitude toward God. The person with faith considers God's revelation of himself and of truth to be certain and sure. The person with faith then responds to God with trust, love, and obedience."

"Biblical faith, then, has two aspects: on God's part there is an act of revelation that calls for a response; on man's part there is a response of faith that evaluates God's revelation as trustworthy and responds

wholeheartedly to the Lord." 1

Acceptable service to God has always been based on active, obedient faith. Those who please God follow his instructions, regardless of their own understandings. How could Noah spend 120 years building the ark? What motivated Abraham to leave his homeland? How could he willingly take Isaac and offer him in sacrifice to God? What about Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua? Consider also Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. What characteristic did all these individuals have in common? Faith! They were willing to trust and obey God!

This passage is quoted three times in the New Testament. I believe each occurrence has a slightly different emphasis. Today's lesson will focus on the context of each of these passages (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

A. Romans Stresses "The Just"

Rom 1:16-17 ... 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (NKJ)

Romans accentuates the idea of righteousness (Rom 1:16-17). The just shall live by faith. The Bible reveals the righteous character of God, and the conditions on which man can be judged righteous by God. In order to be accepted, we must pattern our lives according to the righteous picture of God that is revealed on the pages of Scripture (2 Cor 3:18). By pursuing God's righteousness, we can develop personal integrity, virtue and purity of life (Rom 6:11-18).

It is significant that Romans 1:17 contains two nearly identical Greek words that stress idea of righteousness and just conduct. Thayer defines the Greek word DIKAIOSUNE #1343, translated "the righteousness of God," as "1) in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God; a) the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God; b) integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting; 2) in a narrower sense, justice or the virtue which gives each his due." 2 Thayer defines the Greek word DIKAIOS #1342, translated "the just shall live by faith," as "righteous, observing divine laws; a) in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God; 1) used of those who seem to themselves to be righteous, who pride themselves to be righteous, who pride themselves in their virtues, whether real or imagined; 2) innocent, faultless, guiltless; 3) used of him whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God, and who therefore needs no rectification in the heart or life; 4) approved by or acceptable by God; b) in a narrower sense, rendering to each his due and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them." 3 Both terms have application to the Christian who seeks divine acceptance!

B. Hebrews Stresses "Shall Live"

Heb 10:36-39 ... 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 37 "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But

we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (NKJ)

Hebrews accentuates the idea that faith is for the long haul (Heb 10:36-39). The just shall live by faith. Faith is not a singular event, confined to a distinct point in time and space; rather, it is a way of living. Those who have good and honest hearts bear fruit with patience (Luk 8:15). Eternal life belongs to those who patiently continue in doing good (Rom 2:7). We must run the race with patient endurance (Heb 12:1-2).

C. Galatians Stresses "By Faith"

Gal 3:10-14 ... 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (NKJ)

Galatians accentuates the idea of trusting in God rather than trusting in self. The just shall live by faith. For a person to reach heaven based on their own doing, they must never commit a single sin. However, no one -- save Jesus -- can approach God on this basis. Therefore, we must trust in God and in Christ rather than in self.

In the books of Romans and Galatians, Paul declares that justification by faith is the antithesis of justification by law. The Pharisees, blinded to their faults, viewed themselves as perfect models of obedience. They foolishly trusted in themselves rather than in God (Luk 18:9-14).

Let us realize an important idea: Salvation by grace and salvation by meritorious works are mutually exclusive concepts. Salvation gained in this way would not be of grace, but of debt. If we perfectly kept God's will, we would deserve heaven. We could stand before God and demand salvation because we had earned it. However, this was not Abraham's approach (Rom 4:1-8). The ancient patriarch made his share of mistakes (Gen 12:11-20; 20:1-18). Nevertheless he believed God, and this was counted to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). When Abraham learned his duty, he responded in faithful obedience (Jam 2:21-24). As a result, the Lord put down to his account that he was righteous.

Ephesians 2:9 says that man's salvation is "not of works lest any man should boast." In what works might man glory or boast? Perfect works! This is the only way a person could merit salvation. We earn many things: high school diplomas, college degrees, job recognition, a weekly paycheck, etc. However, do we earn salvation? If a person seeks heaven on this basis, his conduct must be flawless. He must never make even a single mistake (Rom 10:5). Once he sins, he stands condemned. At that point, there is nothing he can do, in and of himself, to remove his guilt (Gal 3:10-14).

We must never take the attitude that "God owes me something because I'm so good." To do so is to ignore the universal problem of sin. The sad fact is that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). If a sinner is to be saved, it will be by God's grace. Man's search for grace is an

admission of sin, a confession that his works have not been perfect (Eph 2:9; Tit 3:5; 2Tim 1:9).

Luther, overreacting to the errors of his day, advocated justification by faith only. However, this idea was supported neither by the prophet Habakkuk or the apostle Paul. Salvation is made possible when man responds in faithful obedience to God's grace (Eph 2:8-10). Grace speaks of everything that God has done, while faith includes all that is required of us. The Bible clearly states that we must obey God if we are to receive His blessings (Act 10:34-35; Rom 6:17-18; Heb 5:8-9).

Conclusion

The faith of the head is the faith that is dead;
The faith of the heart is better in part;
But the faith of the hand is the faith that will stand,
For the faith that will do must include the first two.

This anonymously written poem communicates an important truth: Faith must dwell in the head, the heart, and the hand! Intellectual acceptance of the truth is not sufficient; willing obedience is necessary (Joh 14:15; Gal 5:6).

Therefore, will you not obey the gospel while there is time and opportunity?

[The Revell Bible Dictionary](#), ed. Lawrence O. Richards, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, A Division of Baker Book House, 1990), s.v. "Faith."

[The Online Bible: Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown, Driver & Briggs' Hebrew Lexicon](#), (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft & Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1993), s.v. "DIKAIOSUNE," #1343.

[The Online Bible: Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown, Driver & Briggs' Hebrew Lexicon](#), (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft & Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1993), s.v. "DIKAIOS," #1342.

By Mark Mayberry
From Expository Files 3.6; June 1996

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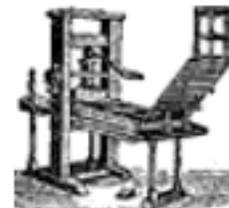


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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

The Just Shall Live By Faith

Habakkuk 2:4

God is the Just One. He does not want any to perish. He wants to justify. This is why he sent Jesus to die on the cross so that we could be justified. His love is our incentive for believing, obeying, being justified and being able to live in this life and in eternity.

Woodrow Wilson said, "Business underlies everything in our national life including our spiritual life." This statement is nothing less than Idolatry! It reflects the beliefs of many in America today. The national life is merely the reflection of a collection of individual lives. Is our spiritual life ruled by or based on our business life? Heb.11:1 says, "Faith is the substance...". Here the word "substance" is the same meaning as Mr. Wilson's idea of "underlies." The Bible says faith underlies life, not business.

Even ideas have consequences. President Wilson's idea had severe consequences! When our fathers bowed their knees to the material god we became a materialistic people. America can not live on bread (materialism) alone. We need to turn to the Word of God for the faith it gives if we will live. In a world of insecurities, ignorance and indifference we are questioning if even the just or the righteous will survive.

This was Habakkuk's question to God when certain judgment was facing his nation. How can even the righteous live when such wickedness is coming upon us? How can a just and righteous God allow evil?

Gods answer in Hab. 2:4 is, "I am working my work in my own time and in my own way but know that the just shall live by faith." They shall survive.

Physically and more importantly spiritually and everlastingly they shall survive. For one who was questioning God this answer is comforting and gives blessed assurance. This in turn leads us higher on the mountain of faith knowing that judgments come so that God's righteous will be delivered from the same wickedness which surrounds them.

Faith in a living and true God, and not business, is the foundation which underlies every aspect of our national and individual life. A few years ago the United States Chamber of Commerce began to accept that people must have faith. Their perception of faith, as many churches today, was not the faith which comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom.10:17). They sent out golden calves and golden angels (guardian angels they called them) which men could use as tie pins or ladies could use as

decorative pins on their blouses. The instructions stated that because of the economic uncertainties America was facing that people are looking for faith in something. They offered to sell these pins to churches and other civic organizations. The prices for which churches could resell these pins could be more than four times as much. These little pins were to give faith to insecure lives.

Business cannot be the foundation of our spiritual life. Business cannot make gods to go before us and comfort us. The nation of Israel turned to its merchants to lead them and to provide for them and the consequence was turning from God.

As the ideas of social leaders have had severe consequences on life, so have those expressed in the creeds, standards, manuals and any writings of men used to determine fellowship. These writings of men substitute for the faith which makes one just. Hiscox Standard Manual For Baptist Churches was a classic case by quoting Eph. 4:5 that there is One Lord, one faith, one baptism, and then substituting his manual for Gods word by claiming these things are no longer true.

What was the substance or faith of the Jews in Habakkuk's day? What is the faith of many religious people in our own day? If it is not the material gods it is the writings of men. In his book, the Gospel Plan of Salvation T.W. Brents stated, "We think it likely that more has been said and written on the subject of faith than on any other subject connected with theology; and if every trace of every thing that uninspired men have spoken and written could be blotted out of human memory, we are not sure that the world would be greatly injured by the sacrifice." Many writings of men ask us to have faith in God and in them, too. The religious world is filled with men trying to be loyal to God and man or riches. No man can serve two masters:... (Matt. 6:24).

In Acts 8:30-31 a man reading from his Bible asked another to come and help him to understand what he was reading. Philip used the scripture to preach to this man about Jesus (8:35). Any writing we confess to believing for the purpose of fellowship must be ripped up and burned up. Any writing, teaching or preaching that does not sit beside us as Philip did with the Ethiopian and lead us through the scriptures to Jesus and the faith he gives is not worth much.

Turn to the book of Habakkuk and learn the life and death realities the prophet faced. Turn to the inspired writings of Paul and other men in the N.T. to learn the life and death realities that these early Christians faced. Read Rom. 1:17-18; Gal. 2:16; 3:11 and Heb. 10:37-39 and learn what these Christians were facing. With each judgment we find God's wrath and God's deliverance. Gods wrath is on the wicked. Gods deliverance is on the righteous. Those who live by faith will increase their faith. Live your life dependent on God's word and during the Babylonian captivity or the destruction of Jerusalem and the great tribulations of Revelation or any other judgments of such fierce wrath and you shall live and be delivered triumphantly. The life that we live we live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. By faith we will be able to endure the severest of trials. We have a hope and a confidence and a blessed assurance and the promise of an abundant entrance into the the everlasting kingdom.

The just shall not live by the ideas of great social leaders or great religious leaders. The just shall not live by material things or the teachings of good men. The just shall not live by faith alone or anything that is

short of a believing, obeying, trusting and dependent faith in God and his Word.

How many read what others say about Christ? How many never search the Scriptures daily to read Christ and to read what Christ says himself? How many will read what God has to say about faith and about the just (righteous) and about the life that they are promised? Will you?

The gospel of Christ is God's plan of salvation. Can we read it and learn? Can we trust and obey it? How shall the just secure their hearts and live? Either way one looks at it the answer is always by faith.

Read God's Word. Search it daily to see if these things are true. Prove your own selves whether you are in the faith. Will you live and live abundantly?

By Mark Alan Turner
From Expository Files 1.8; August, 1994

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THE EXPOSITORY FILES

Habakkuk's Prayer

Habakkuk 3:1-19

Habakkuk is a unique Old Testament book. Even when classified within the "Minor Prophets" category, it has a marked difference.

Habakkuk is upset. He doesn't understand some things about God, and we have a record of his thoughts and his conversations with God about these issues. Jonah's case may come close to this. Yet Habakkuk remains unique.

A good starting place is, Habakkuk 1:6. God said, "I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own." This plan nagged at Habakkuk. Why would God do this? How can God use the wicked as executioners against His people? Habakkuk stated his concern and the Lord replied. Then there came a time when - apparently - the prophet found resolution or satisfaction, though the future disaster was still dreaded. The following prayer of Habakkuk exhibits that satisfaction.

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

2 O Lord, I have heard the report of you,
and your work, O Lord, do I fear.
In the midst of the years revive it;
in the midst of the years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy.

3 God came from Teman,
and the Holy One from Mount Paran.
His splendor covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of his praise.

Selah

4 His brightness was like the light;
rays flashed from his hand;

and there he veiled his power.

5 Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed at his heels.

6 He stood and measured the earth;
he looked and shook the nations;
then the eternal mountains were scattered;
the everlasting hills sank low.
His were the everlasting ways.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;
the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

8 Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord?
Was your anger against the rivers,
or your indignation against the sea,
when you rode on your horses,
on your chariot of salvation?

9 You stripped the sheath from your bow,
calling for many arrows.

Selah

You split the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw you and writhed;
the raging waters swept on;
the deep gave forth its voice;
it lifted its hands on high.

11 The sun and moon stood still in their place
at the light of your arrows as they sped,
at the flash of your glittering spear.

12 You marched through the earth in fury;
you threshed the nations in anger.

13 You went out for the salvation of your people,
for the salvation of your anointed.
You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,
laying him bare from thigh to neck.

Selah

14 You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors,
who came like a whirlwind to scatter me,
rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.

15 You trampled the sea with your horses,
the surging of mighty waters.

16 I hear, and my body trembles;
my lips quiver at the sound;
rottenness enters into my bones;
my legs tremble beneath me.
Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,

18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

19 God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.

What should this mean to you today? While it is one of the most beautiful literary passages in the Bible, the prominent value is - this helps you understand the full meaning of the righteous living by faith, and the joy you can embrace even when anticipating misery. Study the text with that in mind.

A "Shigionoth" is a type of music full of passion and the quick changes and movement of strong emotion. This was composed under strong emotional conditions. He expressed his perplexity. The divine answer was given. Now he is expressing his reaction to God. He is not writing an essay in cold, academic terms. He was emotional in his movement away from confusion to a fuller faith in God.

Habakkuk heard. As a result of his hearing from God and about God and His work, he said, "I fear." His good listening to God produced this reverence and desire for revival.

To the God he feared, the prophet said: "in wrath remember mercy." He could not know ask God to

dismiss His wrath (it was just, see 2:20). All who truly know the wrath of God and expect His wrath against the wicked, are moved to plea for mercy.

Next, the prophet takes a journey back through time, and he marks out experiences where God "came" in His power, with wrath tempered with mercy. Habakkuk is no longer critical or doubtful. He is praising God for His power: "His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power." This is a recollection of Israel's history, which was graced with God's majesty. God acted perfectly in every case. Habakkuk is filled with a reverent understanding of God's power and perfection.

"It has been the usual practice of God's people, when they have been in distress and ready to fall into despair, to help themselves by recollecting their experiences, and reviving them, considering the days of old, and the years of ancient times (Ps 77:5), and pleading with God in prayer, as he is pleased sometimes to plead them with himself. Isa 63:11, Then he remembered the days of old." - Matthew Henry

Yet he still anticipates the coming calamity. And whatever happens - whatever God decides to do - he will trust. No affliction, however severe or wearisome, can sever a real believer from his trust in God. God's past activity, the prophet now understands was right. He describes God's activity: He "stood . . . measured . . . looked . . . shook . . . saw . . . marched . . . went out for the salvation of" the people.

Observe how the prophet, now with better perspective, describes his reaction to God's activity: "I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet, I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us." He knows, eventually, everything will be right and find its' place under the hand of God's providence. And through all of this impending turmoil, hope was not lost. Through the surviving remnant, God would bring the Anointed One of His eternal plan.

"From perplexity and doubt he has passed through the school of God's revelation to him, and now he can look to whatever may come and meet it with quiet dignity and confidence," (Homer Hailey, A Commentary On The Minor Prophets, p.# 295).

Now, read back through the third chapter of Habakkuk. Answer these two questions: (1) Do you see again, God is in control? (2) Do you see again, whatever may happen here on earth, "the just shall live by faith" and "the Sovereign Lord" is our strength."

Indeed we can rejoice that "the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him," (2:20). {Also see Psa. 18:31-33}.

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 14.9; September 2007

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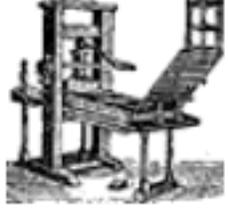
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Zephaniah: The Royal Prophet

Minor Prophets Series #7

Zephaniah prophesied about 625 B.C. which makes him a contemporary of Jeremiah. The unusual thing about Zephaniah is his ancestry. He is of the royal line of Judah, and more specifically of the house of David. His great-great grandfather was Hezekiah, one of Judah's most righteous kings. However, when Hezekiah died, it was Zephaniah's great uncle, Manasseh, and not his great grandfather, Amariah, who ascended the throne. Manasseh became the most corrupt king of Judah's history, reversing all the gains his father had made and is thought to be the king responsible for putting Isaiah to death.

Zephaniah's prophecy takes place during the reign of Josiah, the last good king Judah had. However, like the reforms of Hezekiah, it appears that the hearts of the people are not really in Josiah's reforms. When hearts remain unchanged, outward improvements cannot last. Josiah, a devout man, does his best to get the nation back on the right track, so God promises not to bring judgment upon the land of Judah during his lifetime. It will be coming though, and the time is nearing. Zephaniah's prophecy deals with God's judgment upon His own people, followed by descriptions of divine judgment upon the surrounding nations, and finally a section dealing with the future hope of salvation under the Messiah which will be enjoyed by a remnant of the people.

THE SITUATION IN JUDAH

"And I will bring distress on men, so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord." (ZEPHANIAH 1:17). Josiah began his reforms rather late in his reign, not because of a lack of will upon his part but rather because nobody in the land had a copy of the Law of God given through Moses to go by. It was during this time that an ancient scroll was found in the ruins of the temple and discovered to be a copy of the Law. It was read to the people and then implemented. If the reforms had sunk in deeper perhaps Judah could have been saved. Or if Josiah's son who became king after him had continued in his father's steps maybe the heart of the people could have gradually been turned around. But it was not to be. In fact, Zephaniah pretty much ignores the reforms and warns the people that unless they truly seek the Lord the decree of Judgment will be carried out. "Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame, before the decree takes effect - the day passes like chaff - before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have

carried out his ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." (ZEPHANIAH 2:1-3).

JUDGMENT UPON JUDAH

"So I will stretch My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place..." (ZEPHANIAH 1:4). There are several reasons given in the context of the first chapter as to why God will bring such devastation upon the land; "I will cut off...the names of the idolatrous priests...." (Vs. 4). Idolatry was still rampant in the nation. Josiah's campaign to remove the altars of Baal from the land was only partially successful. The altars removed from the high places could be built back up again by the priests and their willing followers.

"And those who bow down on the housetops to the hosts of heavens." (vs. 5). Also, astrology, the occult and the worship of the stars was practiced in the land. Such was (and is) contrary to God's law.

"And those who bow down and swear by the Lord and yet swear by Milcom." (vs. 5). The god Milcom was the chief of the pagan deities. It wasn't that the people had completely forgotten Jehovah; they still worshiped Him as well. Their loyalties were divided. They compromised their faith and principles. Many in our nation are doing the same kind of thing today. While I need to be tolerant of people of other religions, and never mistreat anyone who is of a different faith than that of Christ, that does not mean I have to agree with or approve of their faith. If Jesus is Lord, then other faiths are false faiths. If He is not, then Christianity is a false faith built on a false hope and a false Messiah who made false claims of being the only way to God (JOHN 14:6).

"And those who have turned back from following the Lord." (vs. 6). This would describe people who at one time followed the Lord but fell away into transgression.

"And those who have not sought the Lord nor inquired of Him." (vs. 6). This would describe those who have never been interested in the Lord at all. They breathe His air, drink His water, eat the food which grows by the laws He has ordained, but choose not to acknowledge Him or express any kind of gratitude at all. For these reasons, the rebelliousness of the people and their halfhearted attempts in allowing Josiah's needed reforms to take root and cause lasting change, the nation will be destroyed. And the time is growing short. "Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly..." (ZEPHANIAH 1:14).

THE OTHER NATIONS

"For Gaza will be abandoned... Ashkelon... Ashdod... Ekron... Surely Moab will be like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah... You also, O Ethiopians... and destroy Assyria... And He will make Ninevah a desolation..." (ZEPHANIAH 2:4,8-9; 12-13). Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron were principle Philistine cities to the east along the coast of the Mediterranean. Moab and Ammon were to the west, Assyria to the north and Ethiopia to the south. In every direction the Lord promises to bring judgment upon the idolatrous and wicked nations. Jehovah is not just the God of Israel, nor is His power limited only to Israel and Judah proper. He is the Creator and sustainer of all. In these prophecies, especially the one concerning Assyria, the prophet predicts what no man could have guessed. At this time, thriving Assyria was powerful and seemed invincible. But Zephaniah contends

that shortly Assyria was to fall and Ninevah be destroyed. This was accomplished when Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Assyria within a generation.

MESSIANIC HOPE

"Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!...The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; and you will fear disaster no more... At that time I will bring you in, even at that time when I gather you together..." (ZEPHANIAH 3:14,15,20). The last section of the prophecy stands in stark contrast to the rest of the message. Out of the dark forebodings of judgment and destruction comes a promise familiar to those who read the prophets. There will be a restoration of a remnant (vs 13) that will be faithful to God and will benefit from God's blessings. The context describes several things which will take place:

Judgments for sin will be taken away (vs 14). This occurs for us when our sins are forgiven in Christ and we are given the hope of heaven instead of prospect for eternal judgment (I JOHN 4:17,18).

He has cleared away your enemies (vs 14). Christ Himself has conquered death, proving Himself able to defeat even this last and greatest enemy of man (I CORINTHIANS 15:24-26).

Rejoice and exult with all your heart (vs 14). Because of the blessings and privileges in Christ, we are urged today to rejoice in the Lord always (PHILIPPIANS 4:4).

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst (vs 15). The Lord Himself came to redeem and bless us. Our King lives in us today. He assures us of victory (GALATIANS 2:20).

Even at that time I will gather you together (vs 20). It is the Lord who adds us to His body, or sets us as spiritual stones into His house ((I PETER 2:5-10).

When I restore your fortunes before your eyes (vs 20). Again, we find in Jesus eternal treasure which does not corrode nor can it be stolen, an inheritance that fades not away, an imperishable crown, or perhaps we could just sum it up by calling our spiritual fortune the unfathomable riches of Christ (EPHESIANS 3:8).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.7; July 1997

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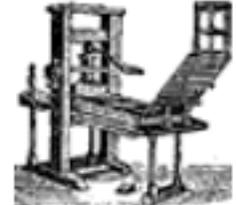


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A Powerful Lesson from Zephaniah

Zephaniah 1:1-13

Zephaniah lived during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. His small book is a part of the section of the Bible known as the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are referred to as such because of the briefness of their writing, not because of the content found within. While we may not know much about the writer himself, Zephaniah sends a powerful lesson to the people of his day all while giving each of us many things to ponder about our own generation.

Zephaniah was the great-great grandson of king Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king and worked hard to initiate religious reform in Judah. After his death, his son Manasseh took the throne and actively persecuted the prophets of Jehovah. Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two by those employed by Manasseh. Altars to Baal and Molech were rebuilt. The people were encouraged to consult with mediums and practice superstition. Evil and violence once again filled the streets of Jerusalem. This trend continued after Manasseh's death into the reign of Amon. He too, became a victim of the violence of the day by being assassinated, 2 Chronicles 33:24-25. After Amon's death, the eight-year old Josiah was put in as king. It is during his reign that Zephaniah's ministry began. During the eighth year of Josiah's reign, religious reform was initiated. 2 Chronicles 34:3 says that Josiah began to seek the God of his father David. By the twelfth year, Josiah moved to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images. The next few verses describe that this reform took place throughout Judah. 2 Chronicles 34 goes on to describe a movement toward God that takes place throughout the rule of Josiah. It was a very significant event.

With this in view, the religious reform that Josiah pursued is not mentioned in the book of Zephaniah. Was he not impressed with the events taking place? Zephaniah describes a people who enjoyed violence and deceit 1:9; engaged in dishonest business practices 1:11; were stagnant in their belief in God, 1:12; and were absorbed in their materialism and pleasures, 1:13. But what may be most revealing about the spiritual condition of Jews in 630 B.C. is found in Zephaniah 1:5. In the preceding verses Zephaniah announces the coming doom upon Judah and Jerusalem. Among those who would experience it are those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, and those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom. Were the reforms of Josiah effective? Yes. Had they not been, we might not see any reference to the LORD by Zephaniah in 1:5. But, it seems while the people may have had a greater consciousness of the LORD, they still believed they could mix idolatry with the true

religion of God. Those who bowed down to the host of heaven were those who worshipped the planets and stars - very common traits of eastern religion. "Milcom" was another name for the star god - Molech. That people were swearing by the name of this god shows they had elevated this idol to the same level as Jehovah. The people of Judah were told they would be punished for disloyalty to God. God demands total loyalty and allegiance. The first chapter of Zephaniah ends with this statement of fact: On the day of the LORD'S wrath all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, 1:18.

What can Christians of the twenty-first century take from this? How strong is our loyalty to God? While we may not bow down to the stars of heaven or worship graven images, we have our own "idols" to deal with. For example, how many fall down to the idol of materialism - letting it sap away our resources and time to feed its insatiable appetite? The effects of the materialistic mindset may be far more reaching than we care to realize. Many work constantly just to keep up with the times. Constant work takes away from the important things. We're run ragged and even brag about it! This has led to a general attitude that sees no harm in offering leftovers of time and energy to God. Materialistic concerns have been elevated to the same importance as God Himself. What is the effect? Family suffers. The local church suffers. Our communities suffer. Like the people of Judah, we too must learn that our affections can not be divided. Our loyalty must be to God first - before all else. Jesus said, no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth, Matthew 6:24. Zephaniah may be an obscure Old Testament book, but it contains powerful lessons that each Christian living today must consider.

By Matthew Allen
From Expository Files 13.12; December 2006

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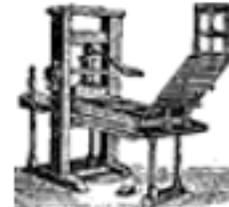


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Settled On Their Lees

Zephaniah 1:12

The prophet Zephaniah gets right to the point in his prophecy of judgment contained in the first chapter of the book bearing his name. Although he states that the Lord will bring judgment on all creation, he quickly turns his attention to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

4 So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.
5 And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, And those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom" (Zephaniah 1:4,5)

Here were the people of God living in the holy city in the shadow of the temple, yet engaged in every evil under the sun. They were worshiping Baals and acting as priests to other gods. Many people had idols in their homes. They worshiped both God and the Baals at the same time. They swore by the name of Molech (the name is also variously translated as Milcom, Malcam or Malcham). "Molech" means "king." He was purported to be the king of the Baals in the Canaanite pantheon. Thus he was their direct rival to the true God. The people of Jerusalem were so far gone into sin that they worshiped two competing deities. They had forgotten the lesson that Elijah had taught in Ahab's day. "And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word." (1 Kings 18:21) So they committed the same sin even in the holy city.

6 And those who have turned back from following the LORD, And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him." (Zeph. 1:6)

As a group, they were far from God and heading even farther out. They did so because they were completely indifferent toward God. They didn't even seem to care that they had drifted. They didn't think that anything was lacking in their lives, or if they did, they were so pleasure bound that they found freedom from God's restrictions a relief.

So even though every page of God's word either implicitly or explicitly states the need to find out what God wants for us to do and to do it, they really didn't care. They were like Rehoboam, the king whose rebellion brought the division of the kingdoms. "And he did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord." (2 Chron. 12:14)

The next verses (vss. 7-11) describe almost district by district the judgments that were going to come on the city of Jerusalem. Then vs. 12 tells of the thoroughness of God's scrutiny of the city and reason for its judgment.

"And it will come about at that time That I will search Jerusalem with lamps, And I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit [that are settled on their lees - KJV], Who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good or evil!'" (Zeph. 1:12)

Zephaniah describes the reason that these inhabitants of Jerusalem were in such a poor spiritual condition with a very telling figure of speech. His figure of speech is rendered as "men that are settled on their lees" (in the King James and American Standard Versions). The New Revised Standard Version updates the figure, giving it as "people who rest complacently on their dregs." Pictured here is undisturbed wine. The dregs (lees) have precipitated out, and have not been disturbed for a very long time. When bottles of wine are not rotated in their racks or casks of wine that are not turned, the wine becomes thick and its flavor is unchanged. For a cask of wine to sit for so long undisturbed implies prosperity and affluence. As a result, good wine becomes great and bad wine simply becomes worse.

Some of the newer translations simply give the meaning of Zephaniah's figure of speech. The New American Standard speaks of the people being "stagnant in spirit" and the New King James says that they "are settled in complacency." Speaking either literally or figuratively, it is obvious that the conscience of these people has not been exercised for a long time. When wicked men are allowed to go to long without disturbance they become set in their sensual ways and they sink so far into moral degradation that it is often impossible for them to recover.

The great symptom of their indifference was that they didn't think that the Lord cares, rewards or punishes. To borrow a phrase from the prophet Amos, they are "at ease in Zion," (Amos 6:1) At ease not because of what they know, but because of what they ignore. These are not atheists in profession; yet are atheists in practice. They don't take the time or effort to deny God in thought and work out a philosophy of it, they just live like it doesn't matter. They live in complete disregard for the Creator who showers them with life and all blessings. So they rest at complete ease in their evil.

God promised to come and search His city and people as with a lamp (or a candle) and reveal all that was going on there. But these men were so spiritually blind that they didn't see their destruction coming. Even though God warned them over and over again, they didn't believe that it would happen. But eventually the day came and God sent an army to destroy them. Such a tragic cost in human life and property could have been avoided if they would have given heed to God's numerous warnings.

God's word and the history of His people teach us that all evil men will be found out and punished. Many of them may ignore the presence of God, but God does not overlook a single one of them for sin cannot go unpunished. Not then, and not now. So examine your own heart and conduct. Realize the light of God searches both your actions and your conscience.

Rather than be complacent, and let your sins stack up, continually have the attitude of David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful

way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way." (Ps. 139:23,24) You know that God will examine everything concerning our lives anyway, so invite Him in to cleanse and perfect it, rather than just waiting until He comes to punish and give retribution for the sin that we've all committed.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 8.8; August 2001

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The Essence of Rebellion

Zephaniah 3:2

George Adam Smith said - regarding the book of Zephaniah: "No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament. Neither dew nor grass nor tree nor any blossom lives in it, but it is everywhere fire, smoke and darkness, drifting chaff, ruins, nettles, saltpits, and owls and ravens looking from the windows of desolate palaces," {George Adam Smith, THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE PROPHETS, Vol. II, p.#48}.

In the opening statements of this prophesy, probably given after the reforms of Josiah yielded little change in people, Zephaniah delivered God's message of warning: "I will consume," (1:1-3); "I will cut off," (1:3-6); "I will punish," (1:6-13); "I will bring," (1:17,18); and "I will have," (3:6-8). The reformations of Josiah were just that; an outward reformation sponsored by a man, rather than the real repentance of individual people. Thus, the time was ripe for God's judgment and Zephaniah's burden was to urge repentance and warn of the coming judgment of God, followed by the age of Messianic blessing.

In Zeph. 3:2 - Concerning the conditions of sin in Jerusalem - there is this statement: "[She has not obeyed His voice, She has not received correction; She has not trusted in the LORD, She has not drawn near to her God.](#)"

I believe this verse describes what we might call THE ESSENCE OF REBELLION; this is what brought all the punishment and wrath from God. This is the rebellion and disobedience that ruined a whole nation. And this is the very thing that can destroy us - individually; congregationally and nationally.

[There Are Four Things Here:](#)

["She has not obeyed His voice."](#)

I don't know what to make of this, except to say: THIS IS SIMPLY DISOBEDIENCE. God had spoken. Through His law, given by Moses; through the fathers and prophets - Instructions, exhortations, warnings and reminders; God had spoken. But at this time in Judah's history, Zephaniah states, they had not obeyed His voice. Shortly after Zephaniah, Jeremiah would say to these same people: "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, "Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,' (Jer. 11:3,4, NKJV). I know, this sounds almost so simple, you shouldn't have to say

it. But the Bible tells us over and over that **DISOBEDIENCE BRINGS DISASTER**. On a personal level; in a local church; in marriages and families, and in society at large: if we ignore God's Word; if we just do not obey Him, we invite disaster! And this is one of the charges leveled against the rebellious city of Jerusalem. What is the message of the Bible ...

In Ex. 19:5 - "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine."

In Deut. 6:24,25 - "And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us."

Likewise, in Rev. 14:12 - "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Each of us just need to decide, "I will obey the Lord." In the absence of that kind of commitment, we hurt ourselves and displease the Lord.

"She has not received correction."

All of us will have to say that we have made mistakes, and it might even be good for us to use stronger language: We have sinned; we have fallen short of the glory of God! After an admission of guilt or sin, the next question is: What will we do about it? Will we say we are sorry; will we do all we can to admit guilt and make amends and seek pardon. And, will we accept or receive correction? Before the sin, during the sin and afterwards - this is relevant. It might be said: it is one thing to make a mistake or transgress; it is another to refuse any correction. Zephaniah told the people of Jerusalem: you have not only disobeyed; you have not accepted correction! "She has not obeyed His voice. And - She has not received correction!"

Isaiah made the same observation about the people of Judah in his day. He said, in essence: "You people have sinned and sinned and sinned ... and because of that sin - **YOU ARE HURT; YOU ARE WOUNDED ... YOU'VE BEEN BEATEN ... YET, YOU CONTINUE TO SIN!!!!**"

Here's what he said, in Isa. 1:2-9...

"Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.' Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten any more? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness -- only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like

Gomorrah."

Isn't it astounding how people can sin, hurt themselves; rebel and suffer the consequences, and yet, **THEY DON'T SEEM TO GET THE MESSAGE.** They are the walking wounded of their own sinful choices; they are bleeding, hurting and suffering because of their own wrong choices. Yet they continue to make those same choices.

"She obeys no one, she accepts no correction."

This is what the prophet said about Jerusalem. This is the essence of rebellion - we should study, examine ourselves and determine to avoid these destructive attitudes.

"She has not trusted in the Lord."

Now this doesn't say - they didn't trust in anybody or anything; this says: "she has not trusted in the Lord." When the prophets identified sin, and the unbelief behind sin; when they exposed this lack of trust in Jehovah, they demonstrated how the people turned from confidence in God, to confidence in man!!

In Isaiah 31 - the people of Judah were **NOT TRUSTING IN GOD** ... they were trusting in their own weapons and tools of war; and they were making deals with Egypt. In Jeremiah 17 - the sin of Judah was written down, and made known, and in verse 5: "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord." Over and over it is apparent: when people stop believing in God, they do not stop believing ... they place their confidence in man!

Zephaniah exposes their lack of trust in the Lord here in our text, and this lack of trust was at the root of their apostasy. This aspect of rebellion caused the writer of Hebrews to say to us --- "Beware, 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 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

Notice the problem; the origin of rebellion and apostasy -- it says here, "because of unbelief." It behooves us to read and study the Word of God, and let our faith develop and express itself in obedience. True faith always discovers its existence in obedience.

Zephaniah gives us this picture of rebellion: "She heeded no voice ... She accepted no instruction ... She did not trust in the Lord," and ... "She has not drawn near to her God."

Having renounced faith in Jehovah, she had scarcely maintained the pretense of observing His worship. They had not drawn near to Him ... in their hearts ... in their words ... in their fellowship ... in their worship and in their lives . **THERE WAS DISTANCE FROM GOD, NOT NEARNESS TO HIM.** When

we let the devil prompt a rebellious spirit in us - this is the result; this is what the devil wants; he wants us to move away from God! This movement away from God may begin in very small steps but it has very big results!

At first - we may deny we are moving away from Him; we may even defend ourselves and get very upset when someone approaches us with a warning. But the devil - in very small steps - wants to move us away from God! **WE HAVE TO BE VERY ALERT ... AND WE CANNOT LET OUR GUARD DOWN ...** the devil wants to move us slowly away from God.

Here is God's guiding hand reaching out to us; He loves us and wants to help us and lead us and save us; and we are moving in the other direction ---> **REBELLION: "She has not drawn near to her God."**

And we cannot look at this - without remembering what's written by James - in Jas. 4:7-10 ...

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (Jas. 4:7-10, NKJV).

Conclusion

Zeph. 3:2 states **THE ESSENCE OF REBELLION: "She has not obeyed His voice, She has not received correction; She has not trusted in the LORD, She has not drawn near to her God."** I ought not to study this without asking: **COULD IT HAPPEN TO ME? Could it happen to you? Could it happen to us?**

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

By Warren E. Berkley
From Expository Files 3.8; August 1996

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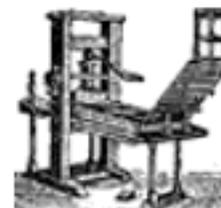


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Haggai: When First Things Come Second

Minor Prophets Series #10

Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries. Haggai opens his prophecy by dating it in the second year of Darius the king. This makes it 520 B.C. The people of Judah had spent 70 years in captivity counting from the date of the first deportation in 606 B.C. This had been in accordance with the prophetic timetable announced by Jeremiah generations before. It had been Cyrus who had issued the edict that Jerusalem and the temple be rebuilt. We can read of his edict in Isaiah, who had predicted it over one hundred years previously, even naming Cyrus who had yet to be born.

God's appointed timetable had decreed that the nation of Judah would be taken into captivity for their wickedness and disloyalty. When this period was up that a small remnant would return and rebuild. It was during this rebuilding process that Haggai prophesies. Sixteen years earlier (536 B.C.) about 50,000 Jews had returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and had offered sacrifice to God on the site of the destroyed temple. Ezra, the priest, was the spiritual leader, and Nehemiah also plays a prominent leadership role in the rebuilding. Both the books of Nehemiah and Ezra give a lot of background information about this time period.

Now, sixteen years after the initial return, work on the temple had stalled due to the people's indifference and preoccupation with other matters. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to rededicate themselves to the service of God and the rebuilding of the temple and not to allow themselves to become distracted by other things. It seems that then, like today, it is easy to push spiritual things aside when we are busy with material things. There are several good lessons that fit wonderfully well into our own world today. While the prophets we have looked at up to this point had given warning of the coming captivity due to the people's lack of faith, Haggai comes to us from this side of the captivity which has already passed. The time of destruction has given way to a time for rebuilding.

STOP NEGLECTING WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE FIRST PRIORITY

"Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'This people says, 'The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.' ... Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house (the temple; J.Q.) lies desolate?'... 'Consider your ways!' (HAGGAI 1:2,4,7). The problem was procrastination. The people had plenty of time to get the things important to them accomplished. They were living in their own paneled houses which they had repaired and rebuilt. It seems as if they had time to take care of everything but the things of God. Had they forgotten so soon the lessons of captivity?

While there was no more idolatry, it seems as if houses and possessions were becoming their idols.

The Lord's reaction was in accordance with His promises and warnings in the Law. The last several seasons had seen productivity go down as a result of drought. Through Moses nine hundred years before He had said that if they forsake Him that "the Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust..." along with other warnings about physical blessings becoming more scarce as a result of their infidelity (Deuteronomy 28:24). Please understand that indifference and neglect destroy just as much as outright rebellion. Haggai points out that the land is already beginning to suffer because of the people's indifference. "You have sown much, but harvest little ... you put on clothing but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes." (Haggai 1:6). That last statement sounds familiar; a lot like our bank account; there's got to be a hole in it somewhere that keeps swallowing up our earnings! Haggai's point is that the drought was God's doing; "And I have called a drought on the land..." (Haggai 1:11). The answer to the problem? To get busy with God's work; "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord." (Haggai 1:8).

People who lack a spiritual dimension in their lives will always feel that something has been missing; at least when they allow themselves to think about it. The people responded to Haggai's message by renewing their efforts to rebuild the temple; "So the Lord stirred up the spirit of ... all the remnant of the people; and they came to work on the house of the Lord of Hosts, their God." (Haggai 1:14).

DO NOT LET IT GET YOU DOWN

"Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?" (Haggai 2:3). This next message comes between three and four weeks after the first message. The people had been busy rebuilding the temple but were becoming discouraged. It had been sixty-six years since the temple built by Solomon had been destroyed by the Chaldeans. The present temple could not compare to the grandeur of that one. The older ones in the group could remember the old temple, but the people did not have the resources that Solomon had used.

The Lord's answer; "But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord... and all you people of the land take courage ... and work, for I am with you,' says the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:4). The most important thing to consider in any work we undertake is whether God is with us. If so, then that is enough. It matters not what others say or what comparisons we make, if the Lord is with us then we have every reason to be secure in that fact. On the other hand, even if others praise us and we feel we compare favorably, if the Lord is not with us then we are failing.

Haggai then makes an interesting prediction: "For thus says the Lord of hosts, ' Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth... and I will shake all the nations ... and I will fill this house with glory ... and the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former ..." (Haggai 2:6-9). This parallels well with other prophecies concerning the Messianic kingdom. The nations were shaken; empires fell and were replaced by others; and the physical temple was exchanged for a new spiritual house not made with hands and consisting of the redeemed faithful of all nations. This is the application the book of Hebrews makes (Hebrews 12:28).

CORRUPTION HARMS THE WORK

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling; If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold ... will it become holy?' And the priests answered and said, 'No.' Then Haggai said, 'If anyone who is unclean ... touches any of these, will it become unclean?' And the priests answered and said, 'It will become unclean.' Then Haggai answered and said, 'So is this people. And so is this nation ... and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer their is unclean.'" (Haggai 2:11-14). Three months after the work began came this third message through Haggai. The first part of the message consisted of two questions asked of the priests. Something holy touching something common will not make the common thing holy. However, something unclean touching something common will make it unclean. The priests answered correctly and the point is made that because of their previous indifference blessings were slow in coming. Returning to God with a full heart will result in full blessings (vs 19).

MESSIANIC HOPE TO BE FULFILLED

"On that day,' declares the Lord of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel ... My servant ... and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you.'" (Haggai 2:23). The promise made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and then to Judah concerning the coming Saviour and King was renewed to David. The throne of David came to symbolize the Messianic throne of Christ. It is to Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, that the promise is carried further. In the gospel of Matthew we find that Jesus is the heir to the throne of David, tracing His lineage back to David through Zerubbabel (Matthew 1:12,16).

By Jon W. Quinn
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Zechariah: "Rebuild Jerusalem; Messiah Is Coming!"

The Minor Prophets, #11

Zechariah began his prophecy during the second year of Darius and continued until the fourth year (1:1; 7:1). This would make the dates 520 - 518 B.C. and mean that Zechariah prophesied with Haggai to the remnant of the Lord's people who had returned from captivity. Through Haggai the Lord rebuked the people for neglecting the rebuilding of the temple and encouraged them to be more zealous. Zechariah does the same thing, but focuses more on the future results, specifically the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. In fact, no prophet, except for possibly Isaiah, has more to say about the Messiah than does Zechariah, with many exacting statements concerning His coming.

Another interesting thing is that Zechariah produced an apocalyptic book. There are four such books in the Bible, the other three being Daniel, Ezekiel and the book of Revelation. This means that these books have a common style in that much of their message consists of brilliant imagery and symbols which must be interpreted. It is the longest of the minor prophets' works, and due to its nature perhaps the most difficult, but with its focus on the coming Messiah is much too important to ignore.

EIGHT NIGHT VISIONS

"I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel, and white horses behind him. Then I said, 'My lord, what are these?' And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, 'I will show you what these are.'" (ZECHARIAH 1:8,9). There are a series of eight visions in the first six chapters of Zechariah. They are as follows:

The riders among the myrtle trees (1:7-17). The captivity of seventy years has been accomplished and it is time for rebuilding. The riders are symbolic of God's angels patrolling the earth ensuring that the nations will not disturb the rebuilding of the temple. History shows us that these assurances were realized and the temple was rebuilt just as God promised.

The four horns and the four craftsmen (1:18-21). The four horns represent the nations which had destroyed Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. But now that the time of punishment had passed, God will not allow them to interfere to thwart the rebuilding process.

The man with a measuring line (2:1-13). This vision goes beyond the rebuilding of physical Jerusalem and the restoration of physical Israel. It foretells of spiritual Zion. The man with the measuring line cannot measure this new Jerusalem without walls (vs. 4) and the Lord Himself is coming to dwell in the midst of spiritual Zion (vs. 10). Also, spiritual Zion is to include people of many nations (vs. 11). All this is fulfilled in the church which is spiritual Jerusalem (GALATIANS 4: 25,26; HEBREWS 12:22,23).

Satan accuses but the Lord forgives the High Priest, Joshua (3:1-10). This vision shows that the Lord will forgive the sins of the people. Zechariah is promised that the Messiah, whom God identifies as His servant "Branch", would remove iniquity in one day (vs 8-10). This would be fulfilled when Jesus gave His life on the cross.

The lampstand and the two olive trees (4:1-14). In this vision given to Zechariah, the Lord sends Zerubbabel a message of assurance. Zerubbabel was the leader of the people and responsible for directing the affairs of rebuilding. The lampstand represented God's Spirit. It would not be by Zerubbabel's own power that the temple would be rebuilt, but by God's Spirit. He would successfully complete the temple. The two olive trees on either side of the lampstand represent the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord, referring to God's appointed leaders of the people; Zerubbabel, the civil leader as well as Joshua, the high priest and spiritual leader.

The flying roll (5:1-4). This vision was designed to show God's disapproval of dishonesty. On one side of the roll is written a curse upon those who steal, and on the other side against those who lie.

The woman and the ephah (5:5-11). An ephah was a standard of dry measurement, usually in the form of a large basket or barrel. A woman is sitting in the basket and is identified as wickedness. She is carried far away. This vision seems to suggest a cleansing of the people; a removal of wickedness so that they might be pure.

The four chariots (6:1-8). This final night vision again demonstrates the protective providence of God at work throughout the earth to ensure that the things which He has promised will come to pass, including the rebuilding of the temple and the coming of the Messiah.

PRIEST AND KING

"...Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Behold a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and who will bear honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne...' (ZECHARIAH 6:12,13). Zechariah was instructed to place a crown upon Joshua, the high priest's, head. This symbolized the coming of the Messiah, who again is called "Branch" because He branched out from David. The crowning of a priest is significant because it foretells that in the Messianic kingdom, unlike the physical nation of Israel where the royal office was separate from the priestly office, the two offices would be joined. This, again, is fulfilled in King Jesus, our High Priest,

who has indeed built the spiritual temple; His church.
JERUSALEM SHALL SUCCEED!

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Let your hands be strong, you who are listening these days to the words from the mouth of the prophets, those who spoke in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid, to the end that the temple might be rebuilt.'" (ZECHARIAH 8:9). This message comes about two years after the series of visions. As the work continues, the people are wondering if the time for fasting and mourning for sins was complete, or should it continue? The Lord encourages them to do a number of things; to let their hands be strong, to speak truth and to judge with truth and judgment for peace and not to devise evil in their hearts. Then He answers to let their fasting become joy and gladness (8:19).

A LOOK INTO THEIR FUTURE

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph. O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation; humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, a foal of a donkey." (ZECHARIAH 9:9). By the Holy Spirit, Zechariah makes multiple predictions of many types in the rest of the book. Some have to do with other nations, some with Israel and Jerusalem and many with the Messiah to come just about five centuries later.

While many nations, such as Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Ashdod will fall (and they did!), Jerusalem will be visited by her king. Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem is very graphically described.

The Lord promises to bless His people, using figures of speech to describe the many spiritual blessings, riches, honor and prosperity under Christ. The Lord will give increase; He will visit His people.

There are also more ominous sounding predictions. One in particular that arrests our attention is the counting out of the thirty pieces of silver that the people will one day determine as the price the Lord is worth and the throwing of the silver to the potter in the house of the Lord 11:12,13). This was fulfilled at the betrayal of Jesus and Judas' own remorse (MATTHEW 27:3-10; ACTS 1:18,19).

We also have a promise of a pouring out of God's Spirit in Jerusalem (12:10), an a fountain for forgiveness of sins which will be opened up at Jerusalem (13:1). This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension (ACTS 2:1-5). The Lord promises, "I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is My God.'" (13:9).

By Jon W. Quinn
From Expository Files 4.11; November 1997

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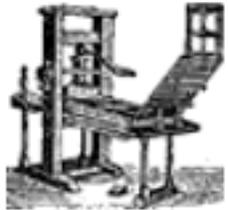
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They Both Displeased God

Zechariah 1:2,15

Zechariah was given the work of strengthening the people, especially the leaders, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, for the task of rebuilding the Temple and establishing a strong state of God's people in a rebuilt Jerusalem. In order to get the people ready for this task he first calls them to repentance. "The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return to Me," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I may return to you," says the LORD of hosts. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds."' But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the LORD.'" (Zech.1:2-4)

Since this was the first generation back from Babylonian captivity, everything that they saw and did everyday in rebuilding life in Jerusalem should have made the truth that God had been displeased with them self-evident. But they still needed to be reminded of this starting point. They needed to come back to the Lord so that the Lord would return to them. They had gotten far from Him and garnered His displeasure by ignoring His prophets. As the people were told by another prophet Zechariah before they were cast into captivity, "Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.'" (2 Chron. 24:20) The first Zechariah was killed in the temple for this admonition. As the history records in the next verse, "So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD." (vs. 21)

But this generation of Jews was better than their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. They were a purified remnant that God could work with. So they are offered full restoration -- not just of the land and temple, but of the full spirit of the people. The door to God was open and blessed were they if they would come. God's anger at them had passed, so the display of His anger now turns to the heathens.

The prophet is shown in a vision of four horsemen who patrol the earth. After their report that the earth is peaceful and quiet, the state of the Jews compared to the heathen nations. "Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of hosts, how long wilt Thou have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which Thou hast been indignant these seventy years?" And the LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words. So the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.'" (Zech. 1:12-14) God's compassion is returning to His

people with whom He was so angry. But in order to show compassion on God's people, the enemies who had trampled Jerusalem must be punished for their evils. The Jews and pagans are opponents who cannot live in harmony; harm to one is help the other. This truth about God's people and the world is equally true concerning truth and error. To let error alone harms truth. To promote truth harms error. They cannot peacefully coexist. God gave a very kind answer to His people. It was time for things to be set right.

God didn't go punish the heathen without cause; they full well had it coming as well. **"But I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster."** (vs. 15) The heathens, exemplified by the Babylonians (who had accomplished God's own purpose by first destroying the wicked Assyrians and being the instrument of punishment God used to punish His own people) and their immediate successors, the cruel Medo-Persians, were displeasing to God just as the Jews had been. They had their time of peace as God worked His wrath on the Jews, but now His attention turns back to them. So many times we take a short view of time and a limited view of circumstance. When we do this we see wicked people apparently at peace and we conclude that God must be happy with, or at least indifferent towards, them and their sins. But even with the ease these nations currently enjoyed, the Lord was still angry with them. God's anger had not been active, so they used His allowance of time to do more evil and heap up more punishment when His anger did come. We are to regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation (2 Pet. 3:15), but they had used it as a time of indulgence in sin.

Notice this one very important point: that although the timing was a slightly different, God was displeased with both the Jews and the heathens as each indulged in sin. The result was that the Jews went to captivity, and the heathens were "terrified and throw down." (Zech 1:21) Both were punished when needed. The Jews did not receive a pass because they were God's people, and the Gentiles were not overlooked because of their ignorance.

We likely understand God's anger with the heathen, but the prophet spent more of his time explaining about God's anger towards His own people. Although this is a concept that we are more likely to overlook, it is even more important for us to understand. The fact that God is displeased with the alien sinner, the heathen, the reprobate and the wicked, is both easy to understand and sometimes even comforting (2 Thess. 1:7,8). But the thought that God might be so angry with His own people can be downright unsettling - for it causes us to realize that this could be us. How many of the seven churches of Asia were pleasing to God? Which of the epistles of Paul to the churches did not contain admonition and chastisement? Some New Testament letters contain more reproach than encouragement. Why? Because in ancient times the people of God often displeased Him. Do we really expect the modern day to be any different?

Let us fully realize this possibility. We must understand that God is displeased with all sin no matter who does it. We often think of God's hatred of heathen sins, but then we casually dismiss those of our own. This will lead us to sure disaster just as it did the Jew. The result for them was that their grandchildren had to rebuild their city and temple once their hearts were purified. How many lives and congregations will we destroy, and how many pieces will we leave to be picked up, before we realize this truth? But for those who are ready to humble themselves and return to God there will be "gracious

words, comforting words." (Zech 1:13) What will God's attitude be toward you? Your attitudes, and the life that develops, from them will make the difference.

By Jay Horsley
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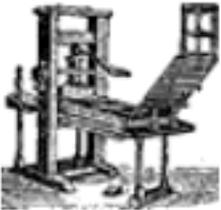
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Overtaken By God's Word

Zechariah 1:6

520 B.C. was a propitious year for the Jews in Jerusalem. Two prophets of God appeared among them to urge them to complete God's work. Sixteen years before, 49,897 Jews returned to Jerusalem and the next year began rebuilding the Temple. (Ezra 2 & 3) But the people soon lagged in their diligence to complete the work. Only the foundations of the Temple had been completed before they stopped working. For fifteen years, the people and priests were content to worship in tents on the foundation of the grand building to be. So God sent prophets to stir them up. "When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them." (Ezra 5:1,2)

Zechariah got right to the point. "**The LORD was very angry with your fathers.**" (Zech. 1:2) That fact was obvious to all who saw the ruined city and Temple that they had to rebuild. But the lesson of God's anger and wrath is not one just for the history books, it applies to all who aren't presently doing right. Zechariah's generation also had a number things that they also needed to make right with the Lord. "**Therefore say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return to Me,**" declares the LORD of hosts, "**that I may return to you,**" says the LORD of hosts." (vs. 3)

God will come to all that come to Him, but experience shows few truly come. Zechariah pointed his contemporaries to the actions of the generation before: "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, **Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.**' **But they did not listen or give heed to Me,**" declares the LORD." (vs. 4) They had been told and told, yet they never did. They received the wrath of God instead of His welcome because they would not repent.

Those that went to captivity may have thought there would be a place for repentance in the future, just as many always think that there is "time, time enough yet." But the longer we postpone repentance the more difficult it becomes, and finally we are out of time. "**Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?**" (vs. 5) Their fathers were gone, perished by the sword or gone to captivity. Also gone were great men like Jeremiah who had preached repentance. The father's time to repent and change was gone. But God's word still remained. "**But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, 'As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to**

us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us." (vs. 6) God told them what He would do then did it. Later, when they repented, they acknowledged that it was just. Notice two great truths in this verse:

1.) God's word overtakes all men and

2.) God does as He purposed (and predicted) with sinful men.

The fathers of those who returned from captivity had run from God's word and run to every idolatry and unfaithfulness. Then they acted like God wouldn't see their sins. Jeremiah tried to warn them, "Can a man hide himself in hiding places, So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD." (Jer 23:24) But not until God's word ran them down sending them to death or captivity did some repent.

Others have run from God's word with an equal lack of success. Adam and Eve hid in the bushes. Jonah booked passage on a ship going the other way. All who think they can run or hide need to learn from the Psalms:

Ps. 139:7-12 "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

10 Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,"

12 Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee."

Too many, even if they don't express doubts about the power of God directly, show by their regular daily actions that they don't think God sees, hears, instructs or warns us. But His word and its judgments will run man down every time.

God's word will overtake all who do not believe or obey the gospel.

2 Thess. 1:7-9 "and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"

God's word will overtake all who serve in a way not faithful to what is written.

Luke 6:46 "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

God's word will overtake all who do not maintain a pure heart.

Eph 5:5 "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

Some will learn only when God's word overtakes them in judgment.

What part of God's word will overtake you? It will be the part that you are not faithful to apply. Do you ever think to yourself that even if God's word speaks against it, you can still safely practice it? Whatever excuse, rationalization or unbelief you hold in your heart that lets you believe this needs to be driven out by closer examination of God's word. Examine what God has actually said and done in generations past and what He has promised to yet do. Does not all history prove Zechariah's words? "Did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers?" And "As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us."

Conduct yourself so that your final meeting with God will be a victorious one and the words that overtake you are "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord," (Matt. 25:21 KJV) and "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Tim. 4:7,8).

By Jay Horsley
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Should Ye Not Hear The Words Which Jehovah Cried By The Former Prophets?

Zechariah 7:7

In this modern day and age we like to think that we are unique, that we live in unique times, that the circumstances of our life and times are exceptional - basically, that we're special. As a part of this we always seem to want a special exemption from the rules that have bound everyone else. Especially when these rules restrict us in ways we don't think modern people in our situation should be restricted. We think that there is some new twist or detail that makes the old restrictive ways invalid for us, and that a new standard, one more to our liking - I mean, "more in keeping with modern times" - is needed.

A similar attitude was displayed among some of the remnant that returned from Babylonian captivity. If anyone was to make an argument that they lived in a new situation, it was them. They came back to a land left uninhabited for 70 years. In the time of their absence from the land they had picked up a number of new practices and traditions. Truly, they thought, lived in a new age, and some of their past no longer seemed to fit.

Over the past 70 years they had made several fasts for the people to observe. "The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth" (Zech. 8:19) These fasts commemorated every major tragic event connected with the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The fasts were to remember Nebuchadnezzar laying siege to Jerusalem (10th month); the breaching of the walls (4th month); the burning of the Temple (5th month) and the murder of good governor Gedaliah (7th month).

Once back in the land, delegation from Bethel came "to speak unto the priests of the house of Jehovah of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?" (Zech. 7:3) The reason for this question was that the fifth month fast was to mourn the loss of the temple. Now the temple is rebuilt. Thus the question, do you mourn the loss of something after it is restored?

Before answering that question, God asked them why they were mourning. "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye eat, and when ye drink, do not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (Zech. 7:5,6) Here is the fundamental problem with doing anything that God did not tell you to do - are you doing it for Him or for yourself? In answer to this question God said, "You're not

doing it for Me." Making up rites that we are to perform regularly instead of having true repentance is an absolute guarantee of doing things wrong. We do for God what God said do. We do for man when we does what man said do - even if we invoke the name of God in it.

So what should they do? God said to listen to what was said before. "[Should ye not hear the words which Jehovah cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?](#)" (Zech. 7:7) What did God say to do? Hear the words of the old prophets back before things were wrecked in the judgments that came on the nation for their sins. In this new age God said to do the same things that He had said to do before. So maybe the new times are not that much different from the old ones after all. "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun." (Eccl. 1:9)

God had given them a set of instructions that were good for times past and also good for times NOW. "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." (Isa. 40:8) Many times we don't want to accept this. In this hyper-technical, highly nuanced, over-lawyered, find a loophole for everything world in which we live, we often bring the same approach to the scriptures. When these returnees to Judea asked for a revelation it was at least during the days of the prophets. Today, man keeps asking for new information even though God has told us that He has spoken (Heb. 1:2) and that this is His full revelation (2 Pet. 1:3, Jude 3).

When God referred these people back to the former prophets, He told them what they should be doing instead of fasting. "Thus hath Jehovah of hosts spoken, saying, Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the sojourner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart." (Zech. 7:9,10) There is no new and stunning revelation here and certainly no exemption from the former rules. They should just do the basic moral things that God has always told them that they should do. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Hosea, and others had each spoken of these things. The people the prophets days didn't really want to do them, "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear." (Zech. 7:11) And there was a danger that the returnees would not want to do them. And there is a daily danger that people won't want to hear such instructions today either. But there isn't going to be any new revelation. Like those of old, we need to look to the "former prophets."

The generation of returnees was promised that if they would do these things that were told of old, instead of concentrating on all the days of mourning that they had made, God would richly bless them. "Thus says the LORD of hosts, "The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace." (Zech. 8:19) Their days of mourning were a remembrance of the horrors that had come on them as punish from the Lord for unfaithfulness. But with a "love of truth" there would be no more occasions to mourn, as God would bless them with joy, gladness and cheerful feasts instead.

Which would you prefer? Which should they have preferred? Assuming we're all answered that we want the blessings, how do we get them? "Should ye not hear the words which Jehovah cried by the former

prophets?" The words of Jehovah by the prophets are in the book. We don't need anything new. If it's new it means that God didn't say it in the past. Yet His revelation was good enough to guide those who went before, it is good enough now as well. He is from age to age the same. So is His word. And despite our think-so's, we pretty much are too.

By Jay Horsley
From Expository Files 8.6; June 2001

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Malachi: A Century After the Return from Captivity

The Minor Prophets, #12 (Final)

The final book in the Old Testament is the book of Malachi. Malachi prophesied about 445 - 432 B.C. The main focus of the book is to encourage faithfulness to the Lord. Malachi was among the third generation of the returnees from Babylonian captivity. A lot can change from one generation to the next. Accounts that grandpa gives of the events of his day often seem far removed from the present generation. Old struggles and hardships seem distant and unimportant. It is also very easy to take for granted things for which previous generations struggled and have been easily inherited by the present generation. We see it in our own day, and Malachi saw it in his as well.

One of the results was that worship had become outwardly formal without inward zeal for many. The people were quite content to give God the leftovers of their lives. The priests, who had the responsibility to insure that only the best of the flock was offered to God, had also grown careless and permitted even the most unhealthy specimens to be used as offerings to God.

Also, divorce was becoming commonplace. The society itself was reeling under the consequences of broken homes as God's will concerning the marriage relationship was being all but ignored. Our nation would do well to heed what the Lord says to them about this, because unfortunately their problem has become our problem.

"The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi." (MALACHI 1:1).

WORSHIPERS REBUKED

"Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire upon My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you." (MALACHI 1:10). The Lord begins by reminding Israel how He had loved them. He had been true to His promises concerning them. He reminds them about how a son honors his father or a servant his master and then asks, "If I am a father, where is My honor? If I am a master, then where is My respect?" (MALACHI 1:6).

Instead of honor, the priests had despised their God. They ask, "How have we despised Thy name?"

The Lord responds by giving multiple examples of the lax way in which they were rendering worship of God. It was no longer a special thing to them, but a weariness. They were giving the minimum amount

of effort to get by. But they were not getting by at all! In fact, the Lord flatly rejected such worship as unacceptable. He would rather they shut the gates of the temple and entirely quit than to continue with the halfhearted efforts they had grown accustomed to giving.

They were bringing the lame and sick of their flocks to offer unto God. The Lord said that they wouldn't even consider offering such to the governor as a gift, but they were quite satisfied to offer it to God (1:8). It is not enough to go through some motions and call it worship. If we are not dedicated enough unto God to give Him the best, then can our worship be any more acceptable unto Him than theirs was? If we are content to give God what we consider the minimum necessary, will God also be content with that? Malachi says, "No!"

CORRUPT RELIGIOUS LEADERS

"And now, this commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to honor My name, then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart." (MALACHI 2:1,2). I suppose that every age has seen its share of religious leaders who were perhaps respected by many people and yet faithless unto God. The priests of Malachi's day were quite willing to let anything pass as worship without saying a word. They were much like their modern counterparts who will only preach what people want them to preach; they won't mention hell if you do not want them to, they will not stress obedience; they will allow their church to become a social organization dispensing fun, food and frolic if that is what the people want, they will advocate a departure from Biblical doctrine concerning moral issues if the people want to live without moral restraint.

These priests should have been serving the peoples needs instead of the people's desires. In refusing to do so, they not only failed the people, they failed their God. "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,' declares the Lord of hosts." (MALACHI 2:8).

THE TRAGEDY OF DIVORCE

"For I hate divorce," declares the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong,' says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." (MALACHI 2:16). There was another thing pervading the land that caused the Lord to reject the worshipers' offerings and prayers. Many were divorcing their wives and marrying foreigners. Marriage was becoming cheap and the most important of all human relationships was being despised.

First of all, such behavior was strictly forbidden by God's Law. In other times, intermarrying with idol worshipers had led to apostasy. Therefore, the Lord had forbidden such intermarrying. At the very least, the message to Christians today is to be careful about who you marry. Many have married out of the faith only to regret it later. In fact, sadly, that is the way it most often happens.

Adding to the sinfulness of these marriages is that many were divorcing the "wife of your youth" (2:14). The Lord says that such behavior is treacherous, to divorce a lifelong companion and a sharer in the covenant to marry an idolator. They have dealt "treacherously with (their) brothers so as to profane the covenant of our fathers." (2:10). Though we live in a different century, the same is true: The Lord hates

divorce!

THE LAST MESSIANIC PROMISE

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' declares the Lord of hosts." (MALACHI 3:1). All four of the gospels state that the promise to send the messenger to clear the way before the Lord's own arrival was fulfilled in John the Baptist (MATTHEW 3:3; MARK 1:3; LUKE 3:4; JOHN 1:23). This passage also clearly identifies the One who is to come as the Lord of Hosts. This certainly shows the Deity of Christ. The Lord will come in justness and righteousness. He will purify His people, redeeming a righteous remnant and casting off the faithless (3:2-6). The Lord was faithful to Israel, but Israel was not faithful to the Lord. Jesus would establish a new kingdom of priests. In spiritual Israel, His "Levites" (those of the spiritual priesthood) would be pure.

The Lord further describes His redeemed ones; "And they will be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I prepare My own possession ... So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him." (MALACHI 3:17,18).

That day will also be a day of judgment. The physical nation of Israel will cast off for unbelief. Jesus announced that those days had arrived and wept when He considered unbelieving Jerusalem's fate; that of destruction. But there is also assurance given to the faithful; "But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings... (MALACHI 4:2). And thus, the final prophecy concerning the Messiah was made, and the people waited. It was four centuries later that the infant born in Bethlehem began the fulfillment of these and other promises.

By Jon W. Quinn
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Behold, I Am Going To Send My Messenger

Malachi 3:1-5

"You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them,' or, 'Where is the God of justice?' (Malachi 2:17).

Malachi prophesied in about 445-432 B.C. during the time described in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. After the return from Babylonian captivity (as had been prophesied centuries before by both Isaiah and Jeremiah), the people had grown spiritually lax. There was indifference to God's Law, both the moral as well as the ceremonial aspects of it. It was a "do your own thing" kind of time with which we are all too familiar today as well. Calling that which is evil "good" is not a new thing with our generation. When we consider the media today, it seems as if the more godless and immoral a person is, the more esteem they are accorded. Divorce and the breakup of the family was also a real problem in Malachi's day (Malachi 2:14-16). Worshipers often were very worldly, offering God only the leftovers (Malachi 1:6-12) and many were just plain bored with spiritual things (1:13).

The question, "Where is the God of justice?" seems to be an indictment against God charging Him with abandonment. Curious, isn't it, that when those who neglect God suffer the consequences of their actions, they are so quick to blame God. Who has abandoned who here? The correct answer is the same today as it was in Malachi's day.

The following chapter tells us the answer to the question, "Where is the God of justice?" Essentially, the answer is a shocker! The Lord answers by saying, in effect, (paraphrasing here); "You want Me? Well, I'm coming! I'm personally coming! I'm going to walk your streets; I'm going to bring purity and truth; I'm going to visit My temple and I am going to judge. But first, I will send My messenger before Me to clear My way." This is the essential message of Malachi 3:1-6. In the New Testament, we find its fulfillment in Jesus our Lord and our God, who indeed came in just this manner.

The Lord's Messenger

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way for Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:1). While the Lord will come to His temple "suddenly," it will not be without announcement. First, He will be heralded by His messenger, or forerunner. The New Testament tells us that the messenger's name was John, who preached and baptized

in the wilderness announcing the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom and calling upon all to repent and make ready. Isaiah had also predicted this (Isaiah 40:3-5) two hundred and fifty years before Malachi. The gospel announces that both of these ancient prophecies were fulfilled by John the baptizer (Matthew 3:3; c.f. Matthew 11:10,11; Mark 1:2,3; Luke 1:76; John 1:23).

The Messiah is also described by Malachi as "the messenger of the covenant" (3:1). This is certainly a fit description of the One who brought to us the "covenant of promise" (Hebrews 8:6-13). In these last days, God has indeed spoken to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2).

The Lord Visits His Temple

"...And the Lord whom you seek will come suddenly to His temple..." (Malachi 3:1b). We recall that Jesus' visits to the temple tended to be rather explosive. Twice He drove out the moneychangers; once at the beginning of His three year ministry and then once at the end of it (John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-17). Many of the confrontations that Jesus had with the priests, scribes and Pharisees took place in the temple. Toward the end of His ministry, it was on the temple grounds that Jesus leveled His strongest rebuke to them, calling them hypocrites for their pride, self-exaltation, dishonesty, inner corruption and rejection of the truth (Matthew 23:1-36).

Shortly after this, Jesus wept over the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37,38) and foretold of the destruction of the temple by the Romans (Matthew 24:1,2). This was fulfilled within that generation, exactly as Jesus had said. But Jesus built another temple; a spiritual one. We, His people, are the temple of God as He dwells in our hearts by faith (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The Purifying Gospel

"And He will sit as a smelter and a purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings of righteousness." (Malachi 3:3). One of the reasons Jesus so strongly rebuked the religious leaders of His day was because they were so corrupt. Their motives were self-serving and their attitudes toward others contemptible. God's Law was never meant to be used the way the Pharisees were using it. John passionately urged the people to "clean up their act." Jesus continued that theme, emphasizing not only purity of action, but of thought as well (Matthew 5:21,22; 27,28; 6:19-23). And who can forget history's premiere statement on the value of truth; "Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32).

When purification takes place, there must be division. Jesus had warned His disciples of this. Those who do evil are haters of the light (John 3:19-21). From that day until this, the world has made no secret of its ill will toward those who live by faith. But to walk in the light with Jesus is better than to walk with the world in darkness, for to walk with Jesus leads home; but to walk with the world leads to ruin.

The Acceptable Offering of New Jerusalem

"Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD..." (Malachi 3:4). Though the offerings made in Malachi's day were unacceptable to the Lord, He announced the coming of a day when He would again accept "the offering Judah and Jerusalem." That day is now, and that "Judah" and "Jerusalem" are God's spiritual kingdom, the church.

Jesus announced the beginning of a new era where true worshipers of God would worship "neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem" but rather "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24). The place would not be important. Spiritual Jerusalem, or "the Jerusalem above" is the church (Galatians 4:25-31; Hebrews 12:22,23). "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of the lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:15,16). We rejoice as spiritual Israel, the "kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

Judgment

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers...and those who do not fear Me,' says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:5). Jesus' mission was not to judge the world but to save it. However, judgment and condemnation became a consequence of not accepting His salvation (John 3:16-18). Physical Jerusalem would be destroyed for its refusal of the Messiah.

Jesus did pronounce dire consequences upon the Pharisees for their faithless obstinacy. Several of His parables dealt with the fact that God would cast the unbelieving nation off (i.e. Matthew 22:1-14). But final judgment is reserved for the final day. The word that Jesus spoke will be the standard of judgment. Yes, the people had asked, "Where is the God of justice?" We find the answer in Jesus of Nazareth.

By Jon W. Quinn
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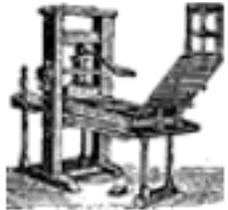
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